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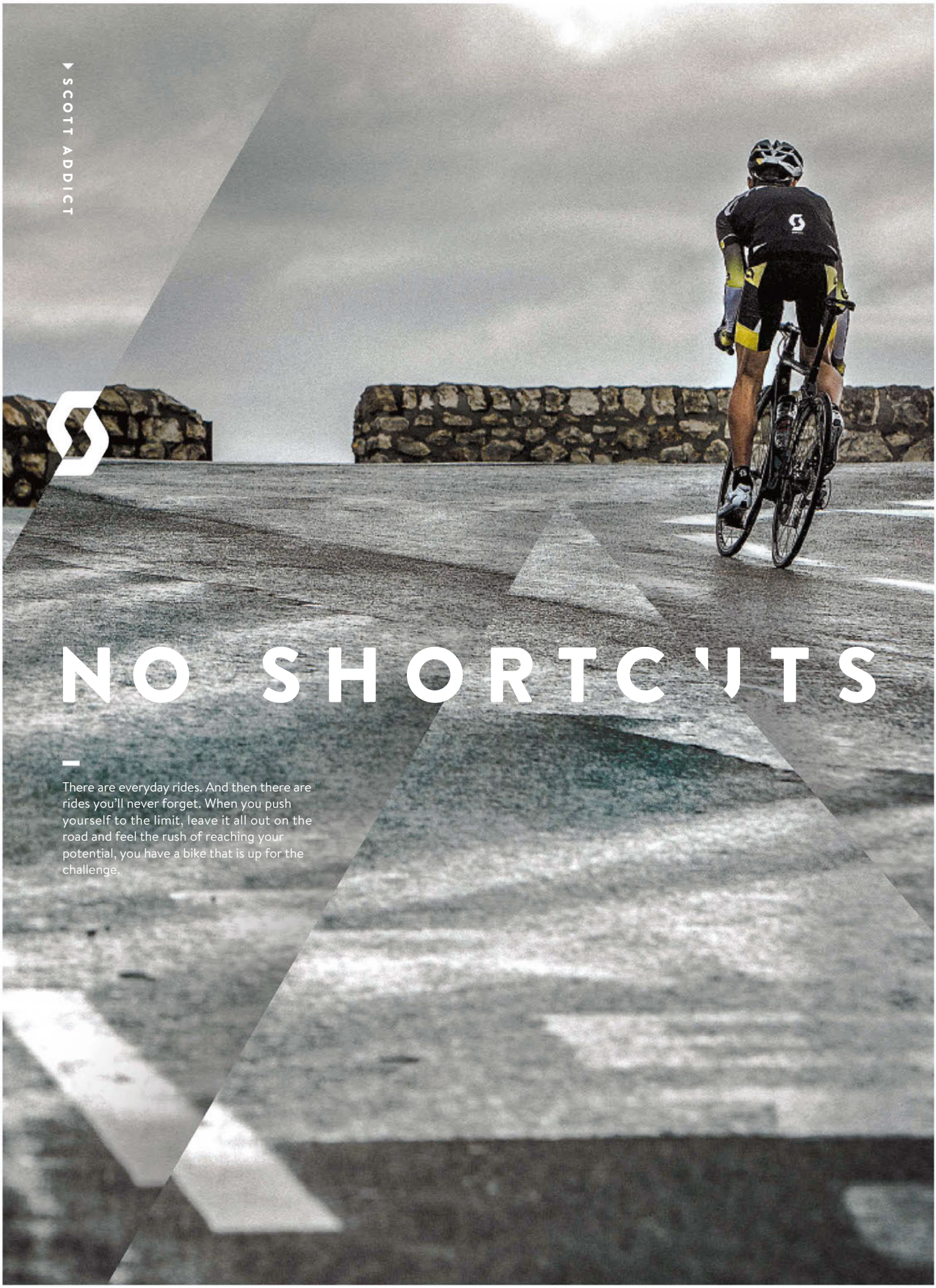

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SCOTT

SPEED, STRENGTH & SKILL MATTERS!
PAGE 70

OUTDOOR FITNESS NOW ON THE iPAD!

Welcome August

SPEED, WHAT DOES it mean to you in the context of your outdoor training? As an ultra runner, triathlete or sportive rider, you'll probably be thinking average speed, mile or km split times and all in minutes, not seconds.

Olympic Team GB team sprint gold medallist Philip Hindes definitely deals in seconds, as do downhill mountain bikers, both are interested in top-speed too. We feature their stories in this issue – see pages 58 and 70. I mention speed in its absolute sense because it always matters even if you don't think it does. There's research, for example, that indicates that the fastest distance track runners are the fastest i.e. sprinters, over 40m. Mo Farah can run just over 50 seconds for a last lap in his track races – a time most people could not sprint when fresh.

A few years back I had the chance to run with perhaps the greatest distance runner of all-time Haile Gebrselassie, and the little guy is fast, very fast, he pops along on legs seemingly made of non-fatiguing high-power springs. He performed running drills and jumping exercises that a sprinter would be proud of. Why is this relevant? Well, to get the most from your outdoor training - should you have competitive aspirations in particular - you should include some speed and strength training. Hindes has speed tips for all you cyclists and we also have the start of a new series of lunchtime workouts in this issue, which you can use to give your speed and strength (and stamina) a quick blast – the latter's on page 62.

Speed is crucial, but so too is skill, something which can also be overlooked - it's one of the other sporting "S's" (alongside strength, stamina and suppleness) - if you have an optimum running stride or cycling action, you'll zip along, compared to someone's whose skill resembles that of a thrash in the bath tub. It pays to learn to perform with optimum technique. You'll reduce injury, have greater economy and a better finishing kick, for example..

However, learning a skill for the first time or refining one that has developed faults over a long time, can make many of us struggle. Maxwell Roche set off for the Lee Valley White Water Centre to learn a brand new one, kayaking – you can read whether his skill learning levels were on fast forward or pause on page 66.

As you'll know *Outdoor Fitness* is all about challenges, testing yourself and doing it all in the great outdoors and being the best you can be. Well, Steve Way, who is "every marathon man's marathon man", did just that, he went from 16 and a half stones to a 2:15.16 marathon time, and elite athlete status, at a time in life when many would be hanging up any aspirations of reaching their peak. His interview is on page 44. He's an exemplar of the five S's. We assume his suppleness is up to it as he explains that he rarely suffers injury!

So although your path to fitness may literally be a long, slow (ish) and winding one, always consider that a little bit of speed, strength and skill work will pay dividends.

JOHN SHEPHERD Editor

HEROES OF THE MONTH

JAMES WITTS
How many times do you fight a grizzly and survive? James does just that and wrestles the 20-mile off-roader, aptly called The Grizzly into submission **Page 34.**

STEVE WAY
Steve Way is very much "every marathon man's marathon man". A hero to the middle-aged who dream of sporting glory, but one of the few to make it happen. **Page 44.**

PADDY KINSELLA
Our contributor Pat's dad, who at 72 paddled down the River Barrow in Ireland with his son. Paddy did ask whether junior was attempting euthanasia by stealth. **Page 40.**

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Cover image Corbis

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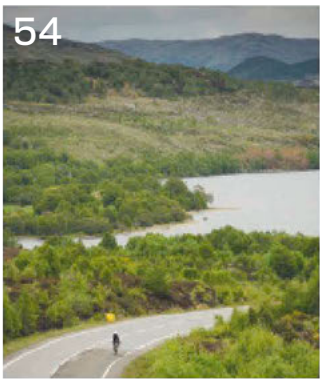

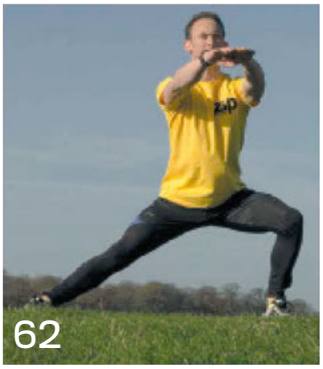

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We run for mums, sisters, friends, daughters, dads, partners, you.

We are breast cancer now

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breastcancernow.org/outdoorfitness

Breast Cancer Now is the UK's largest breast cancer charity created by the merger of Breast Cancer Campaign and Breakthrough Breast Cancer.

Registered charity nos 1160558 (England and Wales) and SC045584 (Scotland).

FundRaising Standards Board

Run for Charity

1,000 women in the UK have their lives cut short by the disease every month. We can't live with that. It's time to act. Take on a running challenge for Breast Cancer Now and help end this disease.

RIGHT NOW BREAST cancer is at a tipping point. More women are surviving. But more are being diagnosed than ever before. And every hour, another woman in the UK dies from the disease.

Breast Cancer Now is the UK's largest breast cancer charity created by the merger of Breast Cancer Campaign and Breakthrough Breast Cancer. They're dedicated to funding research into this disease.

Steven Cryer did just that earlier in the year when he ran the iconic London Marathon to raise funds for breast cancer research after his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. Here, Steven describes the incredible journey he's been on, both emotionally and physically.

"No one ever expects to see their most loved and cherished sick or ill. The news knocked my wife Donna for six with the shock that that 'horrible disease' had taken hold. But in all the time she spent in treatments, as tough as they were, I never once saw her complain or show distress.

> I ate and trained well believing in the journey, so much so that I lost two stone in weight and smashed 21 miles in training. It really has been life changing!

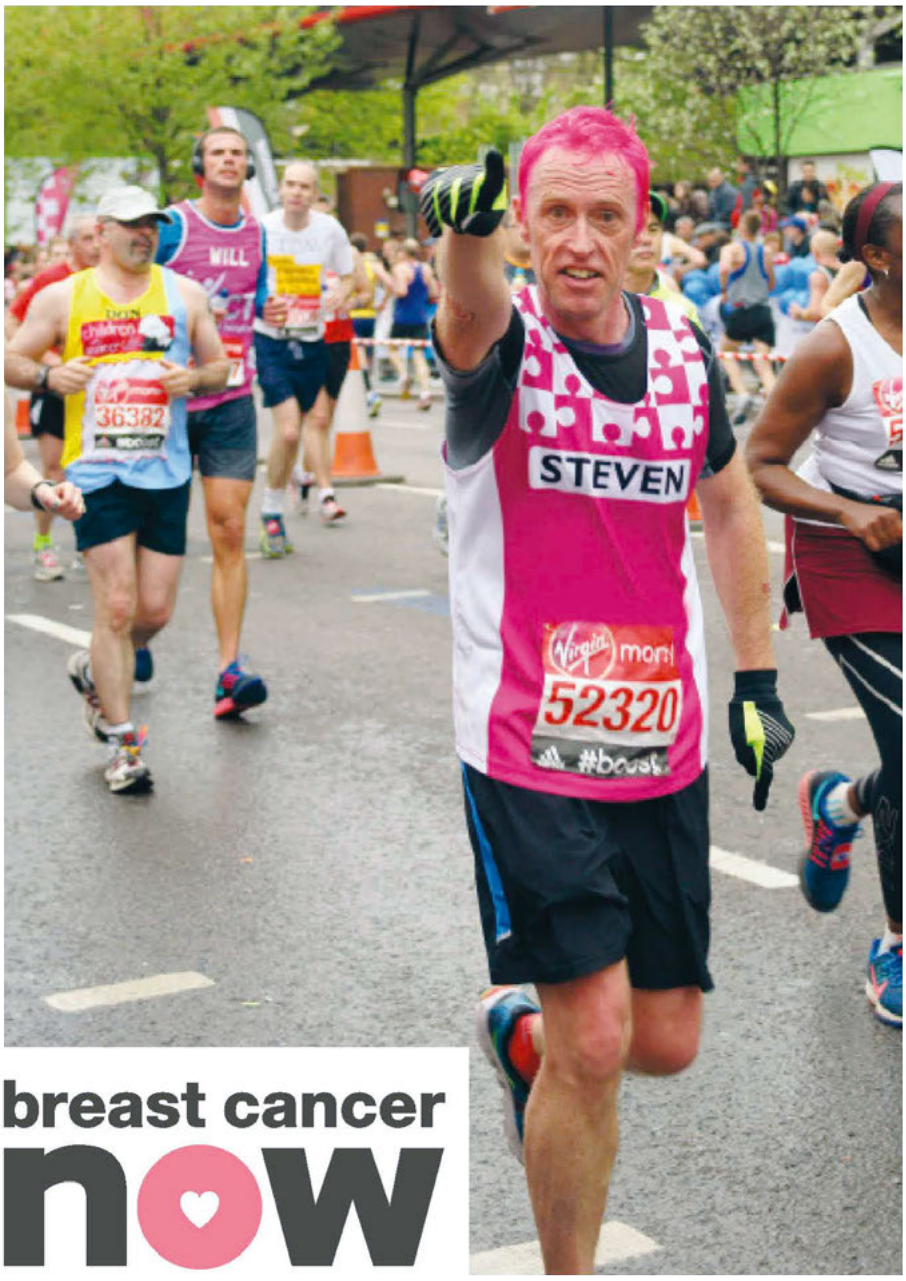
Without the support network and amazing medicine I know my 'best friend' would be not be with me. So to say a big big thank you, the least I can do is try and raise some money for such an important cause in the hope that others will not have to face the challenge Donna faced. Running the London Marathon in April was a tough challenge but was well worth it knowing my brave, tough wife was there for me throughout the journey!

Fundraising has been a great way to give something back and we have managed to raise thousands of pounds for this amazing cause! Many people have been touched by this disease, yet their amazing support and acknowledgement have been inspiring and has given us both a new lease of life!

Training was tough, I won't lie. I'd never run before this and recall hurting a lot on my first two-mile session when I first started training back in September. I ate and trained well believing in the journey, so much so that I lost two stone in weight and smashed 21 miles in training. It really has been life changing!

We thank everyone for their love and affection. Money cannot change what happened to Donna but it sure goes a long way to helping so many people through these tough times and gives hope that one day there will be a cure! "

If you feel inspired by Steven and want to take on your own challenge for Breast Cancer Now, visit www.breastcancernow.org/challengenow to find out how you can get involved.



breast cancer now

The Breast Cancer Now challenge events team will be on hand to support you every step of the way, helping you with any fundraising or training questions, making sure you're ready for the challenge ahead.

Research has made incredible progress, but despite all we've achieved breast cancer still kills – and it kills on a heart-breaking scale. Fifty-thousand women in the UK will be told they have the disease this year. That's one woman every 10 minutes. Breast Cancer Now believes that if we all act now, by 2050, everyone who develops breast cancer will live. But only if we stand together.

Making a molehill out of a mountain, alpinist Dani Arnold, climbed Matterhorn in just 106 minutes. One hundred and fifty years ago the first ascent took two days!

Picture Photopres /Christian Gisi/Rainer Eder

RACING TO THE TOP

The first ascent of the Matterhorn took two days, involved an overnight camp below the summit, and cost the lives of four men in Edward Whymper's party on the descent. On the 150th anniversary of that climb, Swiss alpinist Dani Arnold reached the summit in just one hour and 46 minutes, slashing 10 minutes off the previous record.

The speed climber tackled the 1,100-metre high north face of the iconic mountain, which ranks alongside the Eiger and Grand Jorasse as one of the Alps' three great north walls. Skilled mountaineers would typically take eight to 10 hours to climb the same route.

Arnold began his ascent 3,400 meters (11,150 feet) above sea level in conditions that were, as he put it "really good, if not exactly ideal." He further explained: "In lots of places I found myself having to deal with bare ice, and rock towards the top. Ideally they would have been covered with snow."

His success relies on finding a good rhythm as he climbs with ice axe and crampons, using no ropes or safety protection.

"I wasn't super-fast. The only thing that counts is the rhythm," said the 31-year old Swiss mountain guide, who also holds the record for the fastest ascent of the north face of the Eiger, a feat he completed in two hours and 28 minutes.

For more on the Matterhorn, see page 48

Star Wars' The Empire Strikes Back was filmed in part there; but you won't see any storm troopers or wookiees as you traverse Norway's Salomon Xreid Hardangervidda mountain plateau race.

Picture redbullcontentpool

THE LANDSCAPE STRIKES BACK

FOR RUNNERS IN any doubt that the landscape ahead is going to be, err, challenging it's worth checking the statistics for the first Salomon Xreid Hardangervidda; a race across the Hardangervidda mountain plateau in Norway. Of the 44 starters, only 17 made it to the finish line, having traversed the cold, all-year-round Scandinavian wilderness.

The race takes place in the first week of July, yet this can be an inhospitable climate – T-shirt weather one day, full-on winter kit the next. The organisers recommend that competitors team up with friends, for safety as much as camaraderie, before tackling the extreme 128km event that finishes 1,883 metres above sea level on Mount Gaustatoppen.

In total, there's 4,200m of ascent with which to contend, all amplified by the rocky terrain and difficult conditions. The polar explorer Roald Amundsen, who beat Captain Scott to the Pole, used Hardangervidda to plan and prepare his many expeditions, and the glacier at Hardangerjøkulen served as the ice planet "Hoth" in the film, The Empire Strikes Back.

The Salomon Xreid is a self-supported race, but the trails are marked and navigation by GPS is allowed. Last year the winning time was an impressive 14 hours and 4 minutes - Paul Raistrick from Scotland came fourth behind three Norwegians.

If you're tempted, here's an encouraging message from the organisers: "You will witness the sunset and rise. You will feel pain. You will make new friends. You will have fun and you will probably consider stepping out of the race a few times, but if you don't, if you push yourself to the finishline, we are certain you will say, "It was all worth it!"

More info: xreid.com

Britain's Gary Hunt dives from the 27.5 meters platform on the Saint Nicolas Tower in La Rochelle, France on his way to victory

Picture Vincent Curutchet / Red Bull Content Pool

TAKE THE PLUNGE

THE MERE PROSPECT of peering off a 27.5metre cliff into the ocean below would root most humans to the spot. But not the world's best cliff divers, who combine fearlessness with fantastic gymnastic ability to twist and somersault on their freefall to the sea. They jump from almost three times the height of an Olympic high board and reach 85kph on their three-second descent, with judges marking their efforts according to difficulty and execution.

The Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series tours the planet, and drew a crowd of 75,000 on its last stop in La Rochelle, France, where two Brits topped the podium, Gary Hunt the winner and Blake Aldridge, who now holds the record for the world's most difficult cliff dive - a reverse double somersault with five twists.
More info: redbullcliffdiving.com

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LA ROCHELLE
FRANCE

STARTLINE

ON YOUR MARKS FOR A BRILLIANT MONTH IN THE OUTDOORS

Heart of oak

Meet the man who's just set a new world record for holding the plank.

IF YOU'VE EVER tried to hold your body in a straight line, perched only on your toes and forearms, for a couple of minutes, be prepared to be amazed – and perhaps a little demoralised. A 51-year old fitness instructor from Denmark with the core muscles of a Norse god, has set a new world record for holding a plank – for an astounding 4 hours and 28 minutes.

Tom Hoel's epic feat of static endurance beat the previous record, set by a Beijing policeman, by two minutes.

But it took nine months of structured training, careful eating, no boozing and good sleeping before Hoel braced his torso for the ordeal.

"I have never pushed myself that far," he said. "I had a serious crisis for almost two hours. After mentally arguing with myself, I finally asked for the time at 3 hours and 41 minutes.

I thought that I was still under three hours and was ready to quit but when I realised that I had beaten my former record (3 hours and 8 minutes) and the goal was within sight, I mobilised every resource in my mind and body."

In a challenge that was as much mental as physical, Hoel staved off boredom with the help of an iPad, while his abs, glutes, shoulders and arms did the hard work.

Yet all that suffering was just for a temporary triumph. As we went to press, news started to filter through of a new Guinness World Record for the longest abdominal plank with an official time of 5 hours 15 minutes and 15 seconds by former US Marine George E. Hood, 57.

WHY THE PLANK WORKS

The plank is a great exercise for developing both your abdominal muscles and your stability through the torso, which will help to avoid injury. Unlike many circuit-training exercises that focus on the compound movement of several muscle groups, the plank prevents movement.

It works on two levels, targeting your abs and tightening your deep core muscles around the spine.

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RECORD BREAKING EXERCISES

PRESS-UPS

If you fancy holding the world record for the number of press-ups completed in an hour, you've got less than two seconds per rep. Top of the global leader board is Carlton Williams, a Brit, who managed a chest-expanding 1,874 press-ups in 60 minutes.

PULL-UPS

How many times could you defy gravity in an hour? Stephen Hyland, from the UK, managed an arm-aching 1,009 pull-ups in 60 minutes. He set the record by completing the pull-ups as a series of repetitions: 91 sets of 8 reps, 20 sets of 7 reps, 6 sets of 9 reps, 4 sets of 4 reps, 3 sets of 6 reps, and 1 set each of 21, 12, 10, 5, 3 and 2 reps.

WALL SIT

Skiers take note – if your quads burn on downhill runs, you need Dr. Thienna Ho's training programme. She holds the record for a static wall sit, with back against the wall and knees at a right angle, at an amazing 11 hours 51 minutes and 14 seconds.

THE PERFECT PLANK

1 Lie face down with your elbows on the ground and your arms out to your sides.

2 **Lift your body into a straight line, with your weight evenly distributed between your toes and forearms. The wider your feet the more stable you'll feel.**

3 Keep your elbows bent at 90-degrees, and your shoulders relaxed, not rounded.

4 **Make sure your back is straight and your hips raised. The ultimate goal is to maintain your body parallel to the ground.**

5 Target good form over long duration to reap the maximum benefits of the plank. When you tire it's easy to lift your bottom or let your hips sag, which defeats the point of the exercise. Start at 30 seconds and build to a minute.

6 **Remember to breathe!**

7 When you can hold the plank for a minute with good form, add some progression, such as lifting one arm or leg from the ground, but make sure you stay level.

RAPHA TEAM SKY SA CALOBRA, £30, rapha.cc
Pay tribute to Majorca's famous cycling climb, beloved by Team Sky training camps.

CLUB RIDE H.U.G, £46, hotlines-europe.com
"The Higher You Get, The Higher You Get." Says it all really.

JEEP "IF YOU NEVER TRY," £28.49, jeep-outfitter.com
The perfect motto for outdoor adventurers, "If you never try, you will never know".

MONTANE ALPINE ENDURANCE TEE, £25, montane.co.uk
The world's 50 tallest mountains are listed on the back.

Tee time

Wear your heart on your, err, short-sleeved T-shirt. The training/casual T-shirt is a staple. We all have our favourite, well, perhaps one of these will become yours.

BERGHAUS LAYERED MOUNTAIN TEE, £28, berghaus.com
A technical Tee that works on the hill and at basecamp.

BRAKEBURN VINTAGE CYCLING TEE, £21.99, brakeburn.com
A classic graphic for those who were into cycling before it was popular.

ARC'TERYX ARC MOUNTAIN T-SHIRT, £25, arcteryx.com
Bold graphics combine mountain summits and the letter A.

HOWIES BIKE FORMULA, £25, howies.co.uk
Riders beware! Your loved one may soon have a Shoes Formula Tee!

Fuel your success

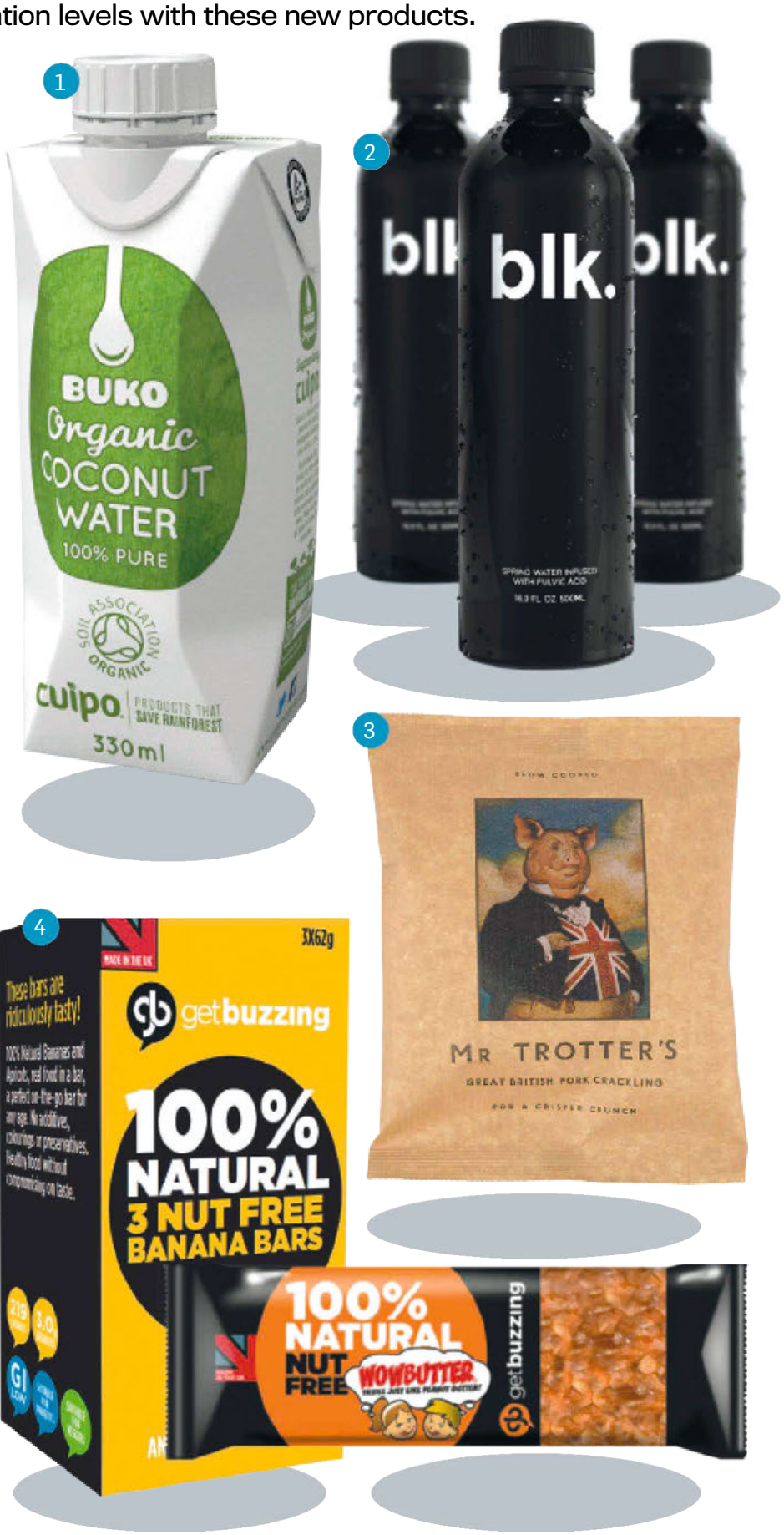
Top up your energy and hydration levels with these new products.

1 BUKO COCONUT WATER, £15.92 FOR 8 CARTONS,
organicbuko.com
New research continues to add to the growing list of benefits associated with drinking coconut water. Already proved to rival carbohydrate-electrolyte sports drink in replenishing fluids after exercise, a new study published in the International *Journal of Biochemistry Research & Review* suggests that drinking coconut water may boost the body's antioxidant systems, which combat the effects of free radicals and lowers the risk of cardiovascular illnesses. Moreover, each time you buy a carton of Buko Coconut Water you'll have the satisfaction that your purchase has also bought a square metre of rainforest to protect it from loggers.

2 BLK, £23.99 FOR 12 X 500ML BOTTLES,
blkuk.co.uk
It's the antithesis of the crystal clear purity associated with water, but this inky Canadian spring water is packed with natural fulvic minerals to aid hydration. It's the fulvic content - that gives blk both its black colour and its electrolyte content - that helps the body absorb water. The drink also has an alkaline PH value of between eight and nine, which means it can help to neutralise acid in the body. Fulvic minerals are derived from plant matter and they are are processed with purified, cool water to create blk. There's no sugar, nor carbs or calories in the drink.

3 MR TROTTER'S GREAT BRITISH PORK CRACKLING, £57 FOR 30 BAGS,
mrtrotter.com
Pork crackling is a rare sight on the nutrition pages of a fitness magazine, but these snacks deserve a mention in despatches for, err, being mentioned in despatches by none other than Britain's heroic Arctic explorer David Hempleman-Adams. Leading four wounded soldiers to win the coveted Marmont Cup for the winners of the international race to the North Pole, he said, "Pork Crackling got us to the Pole. We each ate two packets a day, to fuel us to the top." Each 60g bag packs a whopping 397kcal, 31.9g of fat and 27.6g of protein, so best saved for high-energy expeditions.

4 getbuzzing 100%, £2.49 FOR 3,
getbuzzing.co.uk
For satisfying, sustainable energy there's little to rival a decent flapjack. But inspect too closely the small print on the bars you can pick up in a petrol service station and there's a host of unsavoury sounding ingredients. These getbuzzing bars, however, contain no additives, preservatives or artificial colours, and reassuringly for anyone with a nut allergy, they're nut free (even the peanut butter flavoured Wowbutter bar). The nutritional content of each 62g oat flapjack depends on its flavour, with up to 15g of protein in the recovery-focused High Protein Cherry flapjack, and 291kcal of energy in the Wowbutter bar. We can vouch for the fact that they all taste delicious.



5 things we learnt from Hannah White endurance athlete & broadcaster

Hannah White, 31, is bidding to break the women's world record for sailing the fastest nautical mile.

EXTREME ADVENTURER HANNAH White has sailed the Atlantic solo three times, cycled the seven-day Haute Route through the Alps, and kayaked across England. She is a presenter on BBC's Countryfile and commentates on the Extreme Sailing Series. With Project Speedbird, Hannah aims to sail a nautical mile at a speed faster than 40 knots (46mph) early next year. The state of the art carbon and titanium boat has been developed with the help of Land Rover's engineering expertise, and requires phenomenal strength to sail – Hannah is currently building muscle while losing 4-6kg.

1 **I really wanted to do something in sailing that was exciting and engaging and that the public could get behind.** Equally, I wanted something that could challenge me and stimulate me physically and mentally – the amount I have learnt about physics is amazing!

2 **Sailing Speedbird demands very different fitness and a physique to what I am used to.** I'm very keen on cycling, and now I'm working hard to build my back, glutes and smaller upper-body muscles. I need strength but mobility and flexibility too.

3 **People do not necessarily associate athleticism with sailing** compared, say, to heptathlon, but Anna Tunnicliffe (Olympic gold medal winning sailor) came ninth in the World Crossfit® Games and Bryony Shaw (number one ranked windsurfer in the world) is one of my inspirations and she's incredibly fit.

4 **I'm using Crossfit to build my strength and mobility.** Crossfit is a beautiful cult of like-minded people. Sailing can have a lot of solitude, but going to the gym with a bunch of my friends who are all fitter and stronger than me is one of the best things I do. I love the variety, from gymnastics to callisthenics to balance and strength work; it's had such a profound impact on my posture.

5 **We have to be realistic about my physical capabilities.** There is no point building a boat that is so powerful that a 6'6" rugby player could not control. The beauty of this project is that the boat can sail twice as fast as the wind, so I only need a 20-knot breeze. There's a foil, like an aeroplane wing that lifts the hull out of the water but stays under the water. I feel like I'm flying.

For more information, projectspeedbird.com

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I RUNNING FASTER

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In a tight spot

Compression socks have become a common sight at long distance events, but new research indicates that any benefit they deliver is in the mind. Scientists at the Sport Science Institute at Camilo José Cela University, Madrid, found that compression socks neither improved running pace nor prevented exercise-induced muscle damage during a marathon. They followed two evenly-matched groups of runners, one wearing compression stockings and the other wearing normal running socks, and measured their jump height and leg muscle power before and after the race. They also took blood samples to look for markers of muscle damage. Their results, published in the *Journal of Orthopaedic Sports Physiotherapy*, revealed no significant differences between the two groups after the race on any of the measures. This lead the researchers to conclude that: "Wearing compression stockings during long-distance running events is an ineffective strategy to avoid the deleterious effects of muscle damage on running performance."

The height of performance

Athletes looking to reap the benefits of altitude training may not have to go as far above sea level as previously thought. Researchers in Australia discovered significant gains in haemoglobin and red blood cell count among runners after just three weeks of living and training at 1,800m above sea level. Sadly for British athletes, this is still 500m higher than the summit of Ben Nevis.

Pictures Shutterstock

Beat the heat

Training and competing hard in hot weather can put the body under such severe strain that an international group of sport scientists have produced a consensus statement for exercising in the heat.

THEIR STATEMENT COMES as an inquest into the deaths of three soldiers on the Brecon Beacons attributed cause of death to multi-organ failure as a result of hyperthermia (when the body temperature rises uncontrollably).

To cool down and dissipate heat, your body increases sweat rate and raises blood flow by the skin. But this can lead to dehydration and demand significant extra effort from your cardiovascular system.

The best precaution against over-heating is to acclimatise prior to an event for between one and two weeks in order to get used to the conditions, say the scientists in the *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*.

The scientists said: "Most adaptations (i.e., decreases in heart rate, skin and rectal temperature, increases in sweat rate, and work capacity) develop within the first week of heat acclimatisation."

TO LOWER THE RISK OF DEHYDRATION, THEY RECOMMEND:

- Before training and competition in the heat, drink 6ml of fluid per kg of body mass every two to three hours.
- During intense prolonged exercise in the heat, take on fluids to minimise body water mass losses.
- Consider a sodium (i.e., salt) supplement during training in the heat.
- In multi-day events, monitor your weight and urine (the latter should be the colour of very pale straw) as a guide to your state of hydration.
- After exercising in the heat, take on plenty of fluids with meals.
- Recovery hydration should include sodium, carbohydrates, and protein.

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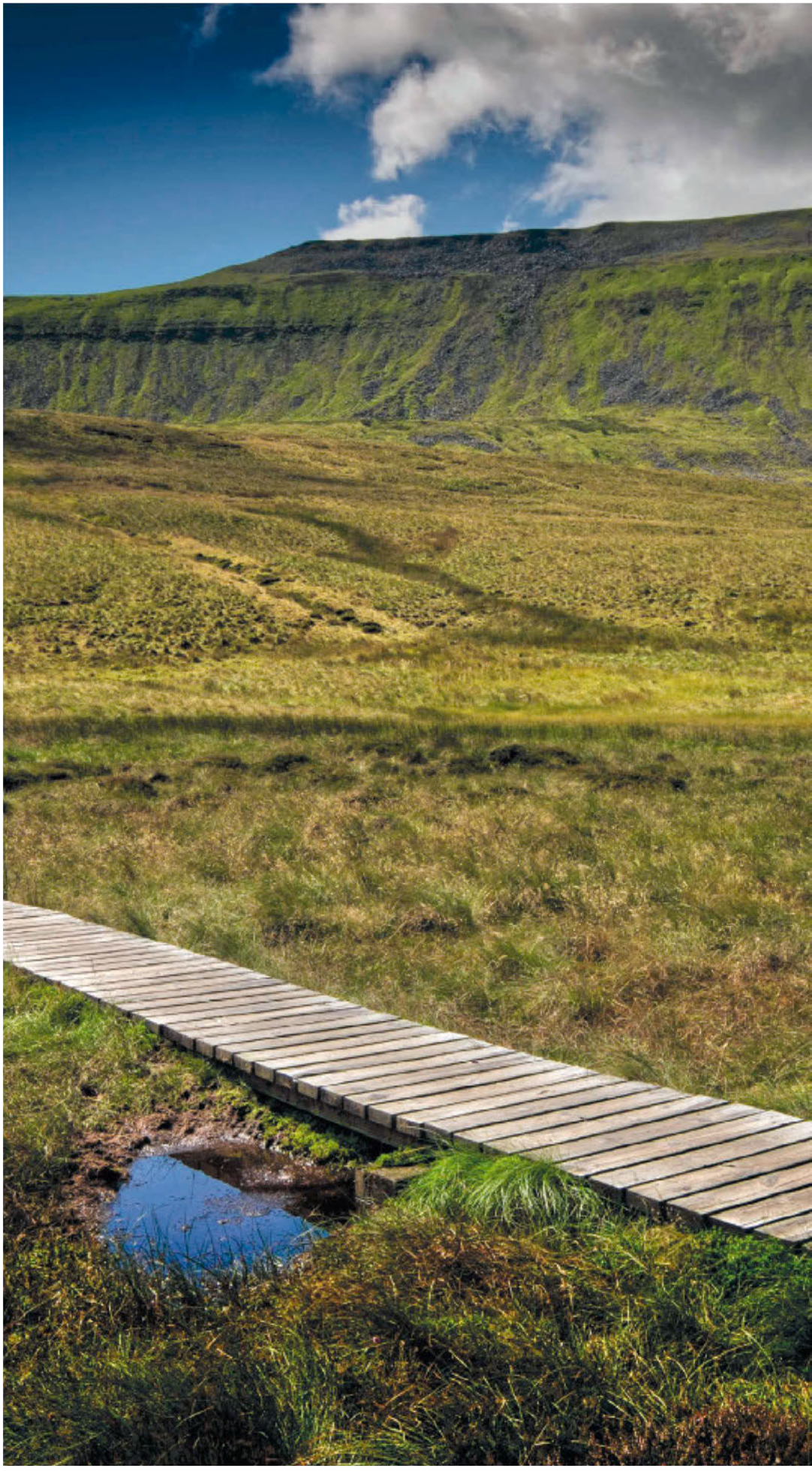

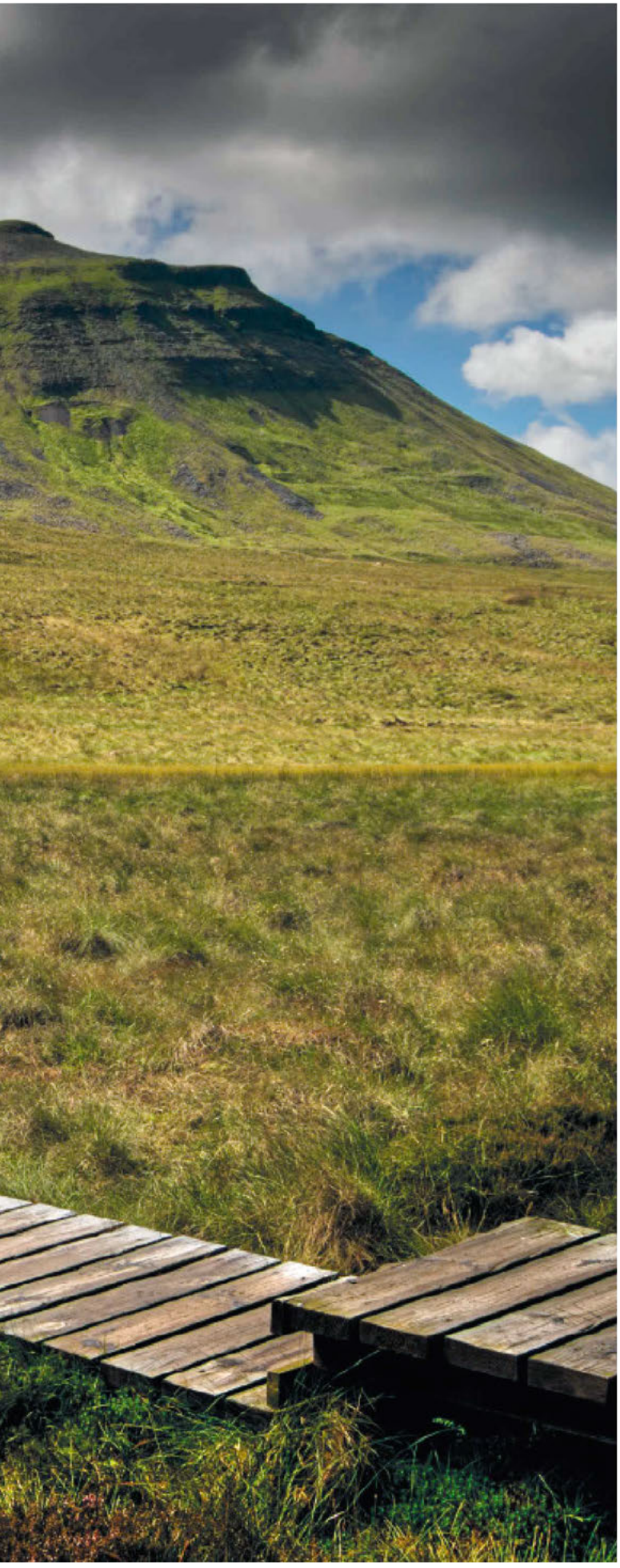

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Summit for the weekend

INGLEBOROUGH, NORTH YORKSHIRE

Challenge yourself with a hike, run or bike over one of Yorkshire's Three Peaks.

Why: A giant of the Yorkshire Dales, Ingleborough is the perfect illustration of why it's better to travel than arrive. The mountain's spectacular profile and dramatic limestone scenery give this peak real presence, although its broad summit plateau lacks the spiky appeal of a true mountain top. Ingleborough is the second tallest peak in the Dales, at 723 metres, behind Whernside (736m) and ahead of Pen-y-ghent (694m). Combined, these Yorkshire Three Peaks represent a formidable 24-mile circuit, whether on foot or on bike, but even as an individual challenge, Ingleborough offers a magnificent day out.

Hike here: There are tracks to the top of Ingleborough from the north, south, east and west, and the entire mountain is open access land giving you freedom to roam where you like. The classic (and easiest to navigate) ascent is from Ingleton in the west, although if the summit is shrouded in cloud you will need compass skills to find the route back down. On clear days it's worth looping around to the north to see the amazing limestone pavement of Raven Scar and the astonishing Ribblehead Viaduct. The popular Yorkshire Three Peaks challenge walk, which sets a 12-hour threshold to walk a route over all three summits, typically leaves Ingleborough to last, a wearying climb on tired legs.

Bike here: There's a bridleway to the top of Ingleborough from Ingleton, offering a mix of grassy track and limestone all the way to the summit. The route might be direct, but the ascent isn't easy and nor are sections of the trail – brace yourself to carry your bike in places. The classic biking challenge is the annual 3 Peaks Cyclo-Cross Race, the UK's biggest cross race by a country mile, and a chance to ride on footpaths normally closed to bikers. This year's event takes place on 27th September, 3peakscyclocross.org.uk

Run here: The variety of terrain, number of paths and jaw-dropping views make Ingleborough running heaven. For the competitively minded, the Ingleton Gala on the 18th July hosts a run to the top of Ingleborough and back, with 600m of ascent in 11km (fellrunner.org.uk). Gnarly endurance runners have the better part of a year to train for the 3 Peaks Race, which next takes place on 30th April 2016. The record for the 23-mile course with 5,279ft of ascent is a barely believable 2 hours and 46 minutes. First timers have to qualify at other fell running events to secure a place, threepeaksrace.org.uk

Map: You'll need Ordnance Survey Explorer OL2 Yorkshire Dales Southern & Western Area to navigate your way around.

Stay here: Ingleton is the obvious basecamp for Ingleborough, and the best bargain bed in town is at the Youth Hostel, where a night's kip costs from £20 (yha.org.uk). For more comfort, head to Bridge End Guest House, where double rooms cost from £65 per night, although there's a two-night minimum stay over some weekends (bridge-end-ingleton.co.uk). There are tasty ways to replace energy expended on Ingleborough at the Inglesport Café, above the outdoor equipment shop. If you can nominate a driver, the Old Hill Inn three miles up the road in Chapel-Le-Dale comes highly recommended for its food and ales (oldhillinn.co.uk); but if everyone fancies a beer, try the Craven Heifer Inn or Wheatsheaf Inn on the High Street in Ingleton.

The mountain's spectacular profile and dramatic limestone scenery give this peak real presence.

Events Diary: July - Aug

There's something for everyone in our events guide...

5TH JULY
HIGHLAND WARRIOR TRIATHLON
Fort William, Highlands
Swim 1,900m in the sea, bike 90km on Highland roads and run 21km through Glen Nevis forest.
£55, nofussevents.co.uk

8TH-12TH JULY
EDINBURGH TO LONDON (CYCLE)
Edinburgh
Cycle over 450 miles lapping up sensational views as you travel through some of Britain's finest landscapes, including the fells of Cumbria and the hills and valleys of the Yorkshire Dales.
£799 (self-funded) or £1,399 (sponsorship), acrossthedivide.com

11-12TH JULY
NORWICH TRIATHLON
Norwich, Norfolk
Choose from the Sprint distance of 750m open water swim, 18km bike and 5km run or the near Olympic distance of 1.5km open water swim, 38km bike and 10km run.
£55 to £60, tri-anglia.co.uk

12TH JULY
BLACKPOOL SUMMER 10K
Blackpool, Lancashire
Run along the promenades of Blackpool between North Pier and Bispham.
£12, fyldecoastrunning.org

17TH JULY
PLOD SOUTH DOWNS WAY (OVERNIGHT ENDURANCE WALK)
Devil's Dyke, West Sussex
Starting at midnight, teams navigate a 40-mile route from Devil's Dyke along the South Downs Way to the finish at Beachy Head.
£99 + £1,500 sponsorship, action.org.uk/plod

18TH JULY
CLEVELAND STEELMAN (TRI)
Ellerton Water Park, North Yorkshire
A middle distance triathlon in picturesque North Yorkshire.
£50, clevelandtriathlon.co.uk

19TH JULY
PENDINE STANDARD DISTANCE TRIATHLON
Pendine, Carmarthenshire
This Olympic distance race starts with a 1.5km open water sea swim, followed by a 40km ride and then a 10km run.
£45, healthylifeactivities.co.uk

19TH JULY
LONDON TO SOUTHEND RIDE
52 or 65 miles from Hackney through quiet Essex lanes to the popular seaside resort of Southend-on-Sea in aid of the British Heart Foundation.
£22.50, bike-events.com

26TH JULY
OUTLAW TRIATHLON
Nottingham
An extremely popular Iron distance event of 2.6-mile swim at the National Watersports Centre, 112-mile bike and full marathon run to finish.
£265, onestepbeyond.org.uk

26TH JULY
TOUGH GUY NETTLE WARRIOR (OCR)
Wolverhampton, Staffordshire
Tackle a 15km course and contend with shoe-sucking mud, wall-climbs and freezing lakes, not to mention super strength stinging nettles. Just grit your teeth and think of the anecdotes you'll have to tell.
£80, toughguy.co.uk

2ND AUGUST
WOODCOTE CHILTERNS CLASSIC (CYCLE)
Woodcote, Oxfordshire
The routes of 50-80, 90-110 and 120-150km offer a varied tour of the Thames Valley and the Chilterns.
£22, £23 or £24, southernsportive.com

8TH AUGUST
THE LONG TOUR OF BRADWELL (RUN)
Bradwell, Derbyshire
Run 53km over the fells of the Peak District with a total climb of 2,300m.
£tbc, darkandwhite.co.uk

9TH AUGUST
CANNOCK CHASE 10K (RUN)
Cannock Chase, Staffordshire
Race 10km on fireroads through beautiful woodland. A cani-cross (with dogs) race is also available.
£17, cannockchase10k.co.uk

STAR EVENTS NEAR & FAR

Sign up & start training for these epic events

»NEAR HORIZON

15TH AUGUST
THE COLOR RUN
Birmingham
Get set for 5km of crazy colour on this fun-run where you start in a white T-shirt and get bombed by vivid paint dust on your way around, so you finish looking like a rainbow. Your kids will love it!
£30.99, thecolorrun.co.uk

»DISTANT HORIZON

20TH SEPTEMBER
MOSER SPORTIVE
Shoeburyness, Essex
This is your opportunity to ride with the cycling legend Francesco Moser, winner of Paris-Roubaix three times, as well as the Giro d'Italia and Milan-San Remo. Moser will be cycling the 69-mile route through the Essex countryside, and aims to ride through the field so everyone has a chance to meet him. There's even the option of a pre-ride dinner on the 19th September, with wines from Moser's own vineyard. Proceeds go to Cystic Fibrosis.
£45, mosersportivegb.co.uk

»LIFELIST HORIZON

7TH NOVEMBER
WINTER BALLBUSTER
Box Hill, Surrey
Brace yourself for one of the toughest duathlons in the calendar. The Winter Ballbuster involves an 8-mile run, 24-mile bike, and finishes with an 8-mile run, on a five-lap course that clambers up and down Surrey's famous North Downs.
£69, humanrace.co.uk

(Download our Complete 2015 Event's Guide at: outdoorfitnessmag.com)

8-9TH AUGUST 2015

THE LONDON TRIATHLON

WITH AN ICONIC city location, an enjoyable traffic-free course and a broad spectrum of race distances that will challenge everyone from fun-hunting first-timers to battle-hardened experts, it's no surprise that the London Triathlon is the biggest triathlon event in the world. One of the highlights of the triathlon calendar for both professional athletes and weekend warriors alike, the London extravaganza attracts over 13,000 triathletes and 30,000 spectators each year, so you will get cheered on like a pro – even if you don't race like one.

Based around the ExCeL Centre in the heart of London's docklands, the race has in recent years attracted a memorable mix of people, including celebrity athletes like F1 star Jenson Button and former Spice Girl Mel C. The event is proudly accessible to newcomers, with over a third of entrants taking part in a triathlon for the first time.

New course details for 2015 will be announced soon but the swim traditionally takes place in the Royal Victoria Dock, which offers the thrill of choppy water without the hardship that comes with negotiating open-water currents. The bike and run legs are traffic-free - a rare luxury in London – and have previously ventured out to tourist-friendly spots like Big Ben and Tower Bridge, so athletes can look forward to soaking up the sights as they race. And despite the biblical number of competitors, there are up to 20 start waves per day to ensure you never feel swamped.

The unique appeal of the London Triathlon – alongside its famously slick organisation – lies in its dazzling choice of race options. As well as the popular Olympic distance (1.5km swim, 40km bike, 10km run), which is tackled by over half the entrants, newcomers can sample the Super Sprint (400m swim, 10km bike, 2.5km run) or Sprint (750m swim, 20km bike, 5km run) events, and bike-mad competitors inspired by July's Tour de France can ramp up the cycling distance by taking on the Olympic Plus version (1.5km swim, 80km bike, 10km run). There are also team relay events over both the Sprint and Olympic courses, enabling you to race with friends or work colleagues and there's even a new Aquathlon and Duathlon course for kids that will entertain any sporty offspring inspired by mummy's and daddy's heroics!

Handy tips from previous London Triathlon conquerors include a reminder to kick your legs towards the end of the swim section in the docks, in order to boost the blood flow in your legs before you move from a horizontal to a vertical position, and a recommendation to pay special attention to the precise location of your bike in the transition area, to avoid getting bewildered in the sea of bikes. But all you really need is your tri-suit, goggles, bike, helmet, and running and cycling shoes - and a few months of enjoyable warm-weather summer training – and you'll be ready to conquer the capital.

More info: thelondontriathlon.com

Get cheered on like a pro by 30,000 spectators when you race alongside 13,000 triathletes.

Words Mark Bailey

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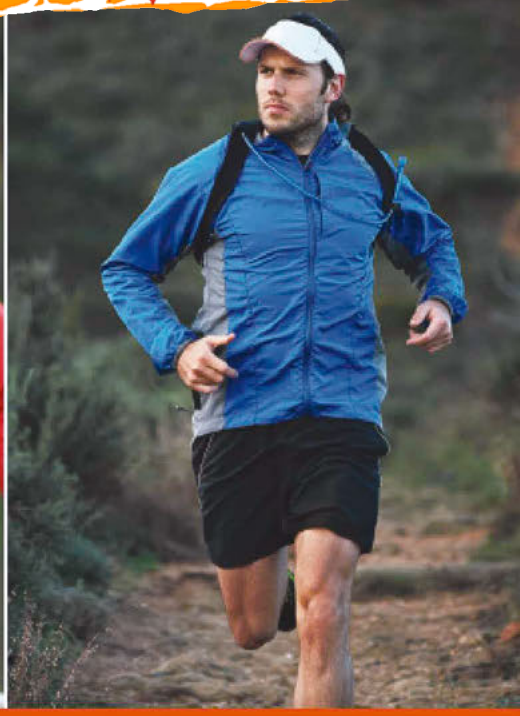

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Sally Hall MTB Competition Winner

Outdoor Fitness teamed up with the SCOTT MTB Marathon series, SCOTT Sports, CYCLE-TEC and TORQ Fitness Consultancy, to offer one of our readers the ultimate mountain biking prize. We're now following our winner Sally Hall as she trains and races though this summer's Scott MTB Marathon series.

ROUND 2 AT Rhayader involved a 70km route that mainly remained in the trees and was supposed to be "dry and dusty"... hmm, the bike and myself could prove otherwise.

Rhayader is deemed "the people's choice route" and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I got round in 4:48:00, shaving just under 60 minutes from my Round 1 effort. To say that this was all down to my vast improvement in fitness may be exaggerating a little though; as other factors such as the conditions, terrain and amount of climbing (6,708ft/2,044m actually more than Round 1, huh?!) played a massive part in my overall speed and time. It really was a cracker of a route that kept me on my toes and on a few occasions got me closer to nature than expected.

I had been following self-set training plans and my aim was simply to increase my time in the saddle - it was no more specific than that. However, just before Round 2 an email popped through from Torq Fitness headed: "Training Plan". With a bit of trepidation I opened it, thinking I'm setting myself up to fail here. I just ride as and when I want; no goals... just for fun... this is a different kettle of fish. But my great prize-wining opportunity is not one I want to pass me by: I want to get the most out of it, who knows what could come from it. So after Round 2 the real training will commence.

RHAYADER

I left for Rhayader after work on the Saturday evening. I arrived just in time for a brew and to watch a local band play some classic hits. I parked fairly close to the event arena, to save walking too far for water and the loos, unfortunately this meant that instead of drifting off in peace, I laid awake listening to rock songs and the hum of a generator a little later than planned! You live, you learn.

Waking up I expected glorious sunshine, but it was drizzly and pretty grey, at least there was no wind. Actually by the start conditions had improved, to what for me were perfect riding conditions; so shorts and jersey and a jacket packed away in my new smaller bag were order of the day.

Soon off, I felt pretty relaxed, then a climb kicked in and the field started to spread out; though not enough for the first couple of descents where we were funnelled onto a section of steep and loose singletrack, where some were less confident than others. My challenge was to see whether I could go slow, but not slide off or stop. These cheeky descents were interspersed along the maze of fire roads we were on, and this is where the dry and dusty comment originated, as some descents were performed in a cloud of dust kicked up from the riders ahead.

Where the fire roads joined with new tracks is where I was caught out by what I thought were shallow puddles. They turned out to be pretty deep, and I got sprayed with mud and soaked my feet. So I ploughed on through the rest; after all it's not a proper ride if you come back clean!

Those doing the 70km hung a right and headed off on a small road to another hillside, whilst those on the 50km, breathed a sigh of relief that they were on the way back. By this point there was more space between riders, which was particularly welcome on descents. There were a few slippy-slidey moments on wet roots, and the steeper sections, which caused some near max heart rates and some "phew, I just made it, that was a close one" moments.

The only time I fell off was on a flattish section I had already ridden up on the loop out; now on the way back thinking I didn't need to concentrate as much, I got stuck in a rut, tried to get out of it, failed miserably, and instantly went sideways too quickly for me to unclip. So there I was in a bit of mud stuck to my bike! All I could do was laugh, brush myself off, get back on and carry on. Those who ride flats are no doubt feeling pretty smug right now, I bet!

The whole course flowed nicely, feed stations came around pretty quickly and the pace seemed quite fast for most of it. Into the final section I took in the views, seeing lovely red kites flying proudly in the sky. And I chatted with another rider, whilst a couple of classic cars led us back into the village. It was a great end to a fun and interesting ride.

IT'S NOT OVER....

Normally after a ride of this distance, I'd have a rest day. However, the Torq guys had other ideas, so after work I went out for a gentle spin. My training plan details how long and at what intensity. This was of course very low to flush out the lactic acid and aid recovery. It was actually a pace I found hard to maintain, but I felt fine and better for it on the much deserved rest day that actually followed.

The training plan mixes interval training and steady paced rides of different durations, oh, and the all important rest days. I have a new road bike and an all singing and dancing Garmin; so I can have a more precise gauge of distance, heart rate, speed and so on. I used to rely on my breathing rate.

I now believe I'm hooked more than ever on this cycling malarkey - it's just fantastic. I've been spurred on to set up more group rides for women in my area - south Wales. I just hope they catch my passion and love of riding.

■ **Follow my MTB journey on twitter @Tea_and_Sally**

Pictures Rob Barker

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TAMING THE GRIZZLY!

THE GRIZZLY IS ONE OF THE MOST BRUTAL OFF-ROAD RUNS AROUND. JAMES WITTS DARED TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE, PRESCRIBING TRAINING AND NUTRITION ADVICE ALONG THE WAY...

Words James Witts
Pictures Tom Lindsey

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The day before the off-road 20-mile behemoth that is the Grizzly – mooted as one of the toughest events around – my wife, two kids and me are in Exeter, staying at my parents' house. Textbooks say the runner (me) should rest as much as possible, perhaps throwing in a 20-minute gallop to remind your body and mind of the following day's exertions. But this is real life. My son's 11 and has more energy than CERN. Sitting around all-day watching TV isn't an option but I'm loathe to tire my lower limbs. Thankfully there is a solution: indoor climbing. We choose bouldering, which is an ample upper-body workout but gentle on the legs. My pre-race day captures the unconventional nature of the Grizzly. Founded in 1988, it even has its own poem, written by Dungbeetle, one of the Grizzly founders. It includes the immortal lines:

Dash to delirium
In breathless motion, dark commotion
Like ants we dash and march in maniacal trust
That we will survive somehow this crazy dashing lust.

The race is so popular that entry's by ballot; this year attracting over 2,000 ants ready to set off from Seaton in East Devon. As for this 38-year-old, training had been solid over the previous few months, comprising running and bike rides around my home of Bristol and South Gloucestershire. It meant my taper lasted about three days, where I reduced volume by around 50% but kept intensity the same. According to my learned friend, Louis Passfield, professor in sport science at Kent University, "That's enough time for your body to improve its performance pre-taper by up to 2-3%."

The last supper was going to be a pasta dish, on top of a lunchtime pasta dish. But I just couldn't resist my mum's offer of a roast dinner. However, we followed healthy rules to ensure it was as athlete-friendly as possible, including leaving the potatoes whole so they absorbed less fat; removing chicken skin so leaving muscle-repairing protein; and 50% of the plate to feature steamed broccoli, carrots and spring greens, providing antioxidants for an immune-system boost.

RACE DAY

The alarm screams at 6am. Race day has arrived. Time for the all-important pre-race breakfast. Over the years, I've completed – to varying degrees of success and disappointment – numerous endurance challenges, ranging from road marathons, sportives to Olympic-distance triathlons. Malt loaf used to be my breakfast of choice but nerves drain the mouth of water, creating a mini-mastication workout that'd leave you with near lockjaw. Instead, two rounds of wholemeal toast liberally covered with strawberry jam, followed by a banana, was now my pre-run breakfast of choice, all washed down with two strong coffees.

Numerous studies have shown that caffeine elicits an ergogenic effect – so much so that it used to be on the World Anti Doping Agency's (WADA) banned list. (Its prevalence in numerous foods convinced WADA to remove caffeine from the list in 2004.) There are many theories of how caffeine improves performance including lowering perception of effort by acting on the nervous system and increasing fat metabolism while decreasing the utilisation of carbohydrates (see issue 41).

Both benefits would be needed at the Grizzly as I knew from experience that in an event of this magnitude, including over 3,500 feet of climbing, my heart rate would fluctuate between 84-93% of maximum. At that intensity, around 80-90% of energy supplied would derive from glycogen stores and I'd be burning around 3-4g of glycogen each minute.

The body can store around 400-500g of carbs in glycogen form, so even at maximum capacity of 500g, that could leave a shortfall at around the 125 minutes mark. In the build-up, two-time Grizzly winner Ceri Rees had told me to aim for your marathon time. For me, that's around 3:35:00. Relying on glycogen alone, I'd run out of carbs around 90 minutes before I reached the finish line. Worrying!

Hence, my race nutrition solution: I'm comfortable ingesting around 50g of carbs per hour. Anymore and my gut begins to cry. The plan was to consume five SiS Orange Go Gels – one roughly every half-hour, each containing 22g of carbs. In addition, my hydration pack comprised two litres of SiS isotonic drink with 100g of carbs. That 210g carb total, I fathomed would still leave a deficit but I hoped that either energy derived from burning fat during lower-intensity moments (running downhill and on the flats) or pure adrenaline would compensate.

AND THEY'RE OFF...

The town crier bellows some words of inspiration and the race begins. As soon as you've crossed the start line, you're 180-ing onto the pebbled beach and immediately you're confronted with an issue common to off-road races and that's pacing. With little rebound force from nature's carpet, my usual 20-mile pace of around 7:50-minute per mile would be wishful thinking. Instead, I'd run by heart rate, ensuring I didn't tip over 93% max HR and, if I did, I'd slow down.

And that's what we're doing two miles in as the field bottlenecks ascending the first proper climb of the day. As the terrain briefly levels, we're running again and soon descending into Beer, before climbing out of this picturesque town en-route to Branscombe. Key to a course like the Grizzly, with surprises around every turn, is the course recce. By visualising the course in training – in the Grizzly's case, feeling the coastal wind, hearing the waves and breathing the fresh air – you can enjoy a host of physical benefits. MRI scans have shown that imagining the situation activates the neural pathways you'd activate if physically completing the action, aside from the final motor output. Just take a look at Mr Rooney, England's third-highest goalscorer.

"Wayne Rooney makes visualization a key part of his preparation," says Dr Martin Turner, lecturer in sport and exercise psychology at Staffordshire University. "He always asks the kit man which kit they'll be wearing for each match, and he'll lie in bed vividly picturing himself, for example, dressed in red top, white shorts, white socks, scoring a goal."

I'd recced parts of the course earlier in the year, specifically this climb out of Beer, adorned in the kit I'd wear on the day (see boxout). I'd also dabbled with the course recce's best friend – Google Maps. Familiarity certainly breeds confidence and, whether it's visualisation or the previous day's roast, I storm out of Beer and enjoy the views of the English Channel.

HEAR NO DRAG

I also enjoy the sounds – or lack of them emanating from me. The NoPinz Speed Wallet is a recent addition to my racing wardrobe, its genius lying in its simplicity. Instead of tearing your top with four safety pins, you slip your race number into a transparent adhesive wallet that's stuck to your apparel. Not only are the benefits aesthetic, they're aerodynamic, too. Billowing race numbers make a right racket and that noise is aural manifestation of drag. My number made no noise. Its impact on performance wasn't quantifiable but it certainly gave me a psychological boost, encouraging me to stride on while my spirits were raised. (Admittedly, this focus on no billowing deserted me near the end. Instead, all I could hear was my deep breathing and blood acidity levels rising!)

The next 10 miles sees me negotiate energy-sapping bogs, the camber of sloping fields, and terrain that sees you ascending and descending all too frequently. As expected, my heart rate hovers around 84-93% of max. I'm also sticking to my nutrition strategy of constant sipping and half-hourly gels.

One aspect the course recce and mental rehearsal hadn't prepared me for was "odour de wild garlic". This being early March, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's favourite was out in abundance, lifting the spirits and appetite. (The memories would motivate me to go wild garlic picking for Tom Kerridge's take on wild garlic soup. Great for you; anti-social for your partner.)

The Grizzly's also renowned for its signage, both motivational – "Believing is the first step to achieving", and quirky, "A wedge end of the thin". That quirkiness stretches to spectators with the "Buddhist corner" filling the nostrils with incense and a lone bagpiper rousing the troops. But it's at the 14th-century Fountain Head, around 14 miles in at Branscombe that eccentricity's cranked up to 11. Folk music fills the air along with reams of bunting. Cheers and beers greet you from the joyful crowds, and you can't fathom whether it's inspiring or resembles East Devon's equivalent of the Whicker Man. Either way it offers a momentary distraction from the pain. And the hills. Oh so many hills.

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THOSE DAMN HILLS

In training, I'd practised downhill and uphill running technique. Over a race that could last up to four hours, improving economy over 3,500 feet of climbing could save me minutes. Rees guided me on a camp late last year and offered these pearls of wisdom: "Downhill running is counter-intuitive, as I'd recommend trying to lean forward. It'll send your hips over your ankles, so creating less impact and less braking momentum," he told me. "As for uphill running, relax and feel like you're breathing from your lower abdomen rather than your lungs. If you can do that, you're less likely to reach the top of the hill completely out of breath. If the fatigue's killing you and you truly can't hold form, it's probably time to walk."

That last point proved particularly relevant. For the first 90 minutes, I'd tried my hardest to run, albeit a slow-feet shuffle. I'd always been of the mindset that walking uphill was a fast-track ticket to a DNF. Alone, I still feel the same. But through the trees, I could see all in front had retreated to a walk, crouched over, trying to extract forward momentum by grabbing thighs. It turned out to be an efficient strategy for the remainder of the run.

In all honesty, the hill training hadn't been as regular as I'd have liked. Experience has shown me that too high an intensity during the winter months results in a chest infection (I had asthma as a youth) so an off-road route that comprised two short, sharp hills and two long gradual ascents was ticked off just once a week. In an ideal world, this'd have been doubled.

CRAMP STRIKES

The lack of hill training bit hard around 16 miles in, where a mile of pebbled beach flowed into a steep, ziz-zag ascent back to Beer. And that's when cramp struck. Despite advances in exercise physiology, it's startling that the cause of muscle cramp remains unknown. (To be fair, this is predominantly down to the near impossibility of taking a muscle biopsy of a cramping muscle.) However, we're all aware of situations where we are more liable for that "Aaaaarrrgggghhhh, s&%t" feeling. Mine is after around two hours of running, especially at high intensity and when cold (which was very much the case at the Grizzly with its bogs, bogs and more bogs) bites.

In a desperate attempt to revive my legs, I abandon my nutrition strategy and grabbed a handful of Jelly babies from the generous spectators. And then another handful and another...Perhaps I benefit from an energy boost as come the descent to the finish line at Seaton, I'm striding out, well I was until my speed is curtailed by my cramping calves. And the situation's compounded by a feeling of nausea from all those Jelly babies.

But despite my growing list of ailments, I cross the line in 3:34:44, leaving me 403rd out of 1,422 finishers and nearly 1:17 hours behind the winner for the now third time, Ceri Rees. (For reference, Clare Prosser of Wells City Harriers won the women's race in 2:38:59.) Over a post-race banana and flapjack, adorned in the very pink finisher's T-shirt, I reflect on a fantastic event whose quirkiness is matched by its brutality. And then, as per pre-race day, it's off for a post-race roast...!

More info, axevallyerunners.org/grizzly

OFF-ROAD RUN GEAR

This trail wardrobe should see you through most races...

HYDRATION PACK

At many off-road events, fuelling stops are at a premium so some form of hydration carrier's a must, especially if competing for over two hours. I plumped for Caribee's Hi-Visbility Flow, which comes with a two-litre bladder – ample for my Grizzly needs – and side pockets that proved handy for jacket storage.

RUN JACKET

Coastal races like the Grizzly can see conditions change from one hill to the next so a showerproof run jacket could well be a lifesaver. I used a luminescent top from adidas that fends off brief downpours, is damn comfy and lights up like a beacon at night races.

OFF-ROAD RUN SHOES

Off-road shoes are a must, primarily because of the added traction offered on the outsole. I've run in Inov's X-Talon 212s for a couple of seasons now and can only recommend. They're lighter than my road shoes, which is fine for the softer terrain, and their blade-like outsole grips slippery grass banks well. They're not waterproof but even Gore-Tex would struggle to remain dry in the bogs of the Grizzly.

RUN T

Over 20 miles of undulating terrain, you're going to heat up – even in early March. That's why I chose short-sleeved over long. Zoot is better known as a triathlon brand but their run top the Zoot Ultra Run Icefil Tee, is one of the most comfortable around.

LEGGINGS

Many of my Grizzly contemporaries wore shorts but with bogs and mud galore, I went for a pair of Helly Hansen leggings, the idea being they'd keep my legs warm and so reduce the chances of cramping. As it transpired, clearly it'd need something with the thermal capacity of a flask to perform such a feat!

HEART RATE MONITOR

Not essential but my Garmin 620 provided a reassuring guide when the undulating – at times, sheer – terrain meant pacing fluctuated all over the place. I set my Garmin to percentage of maximum heart rate as, in exercise terms, that has more meaning than displaying your actual heart rate.

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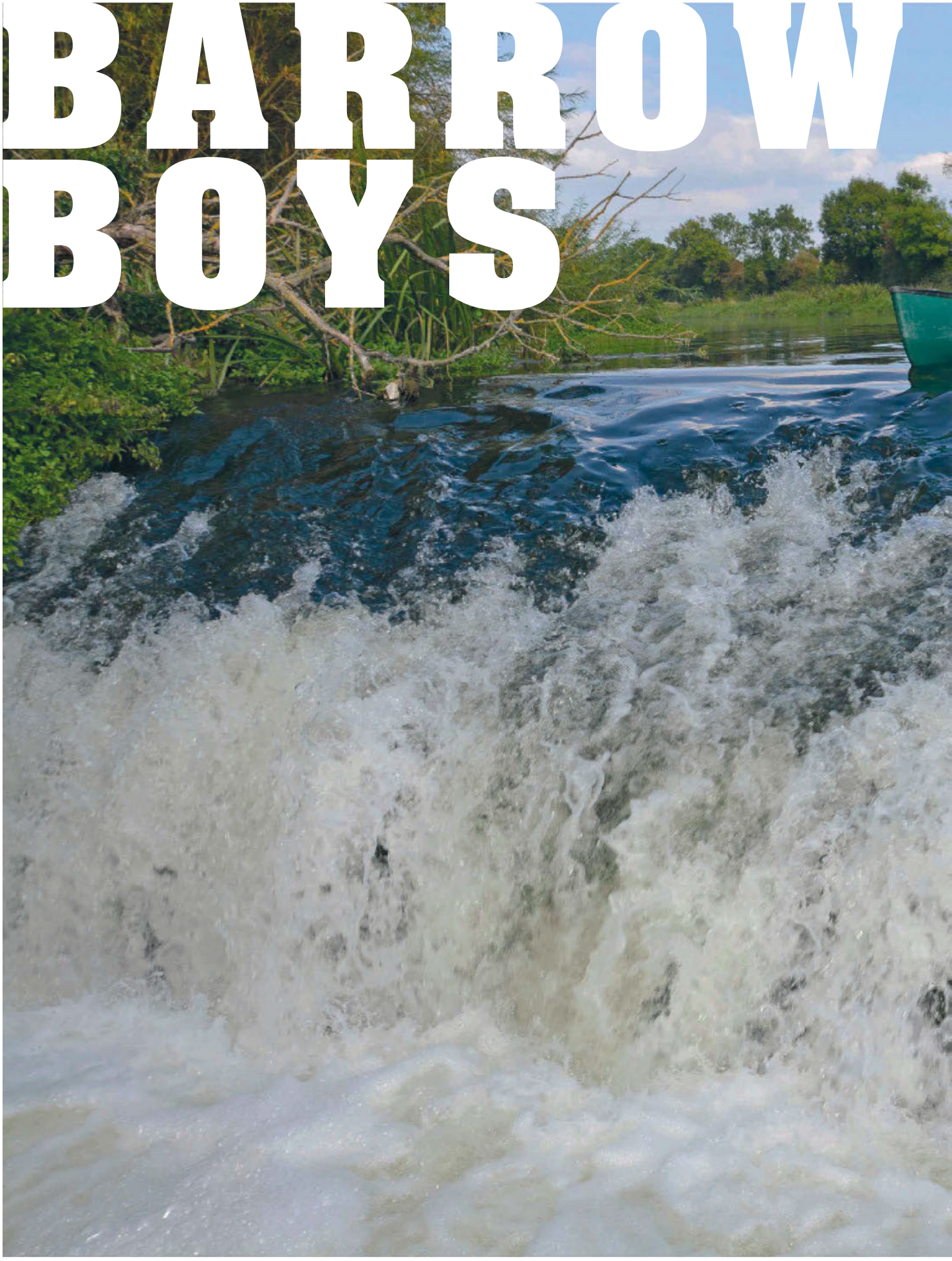
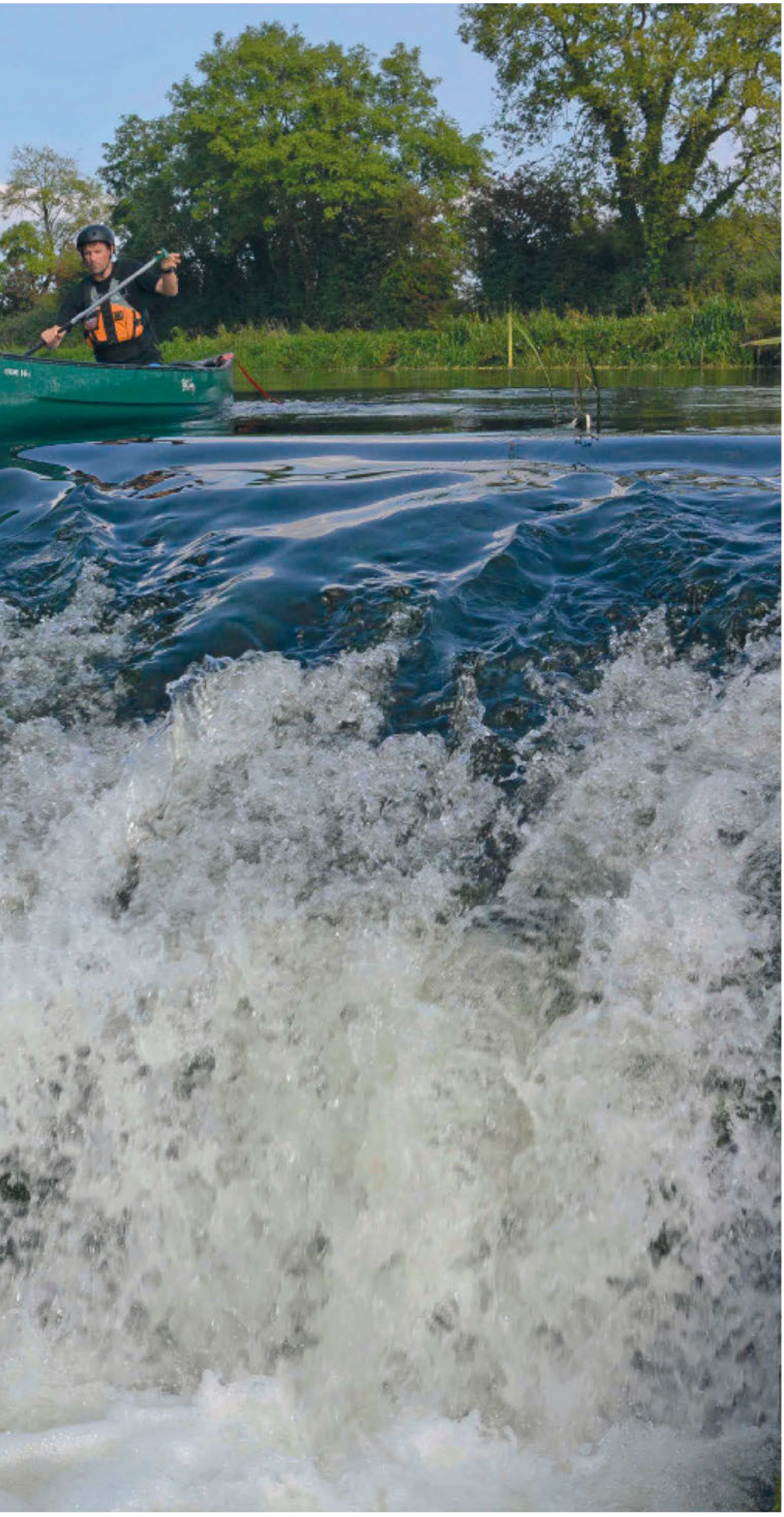
BARROW BOYS





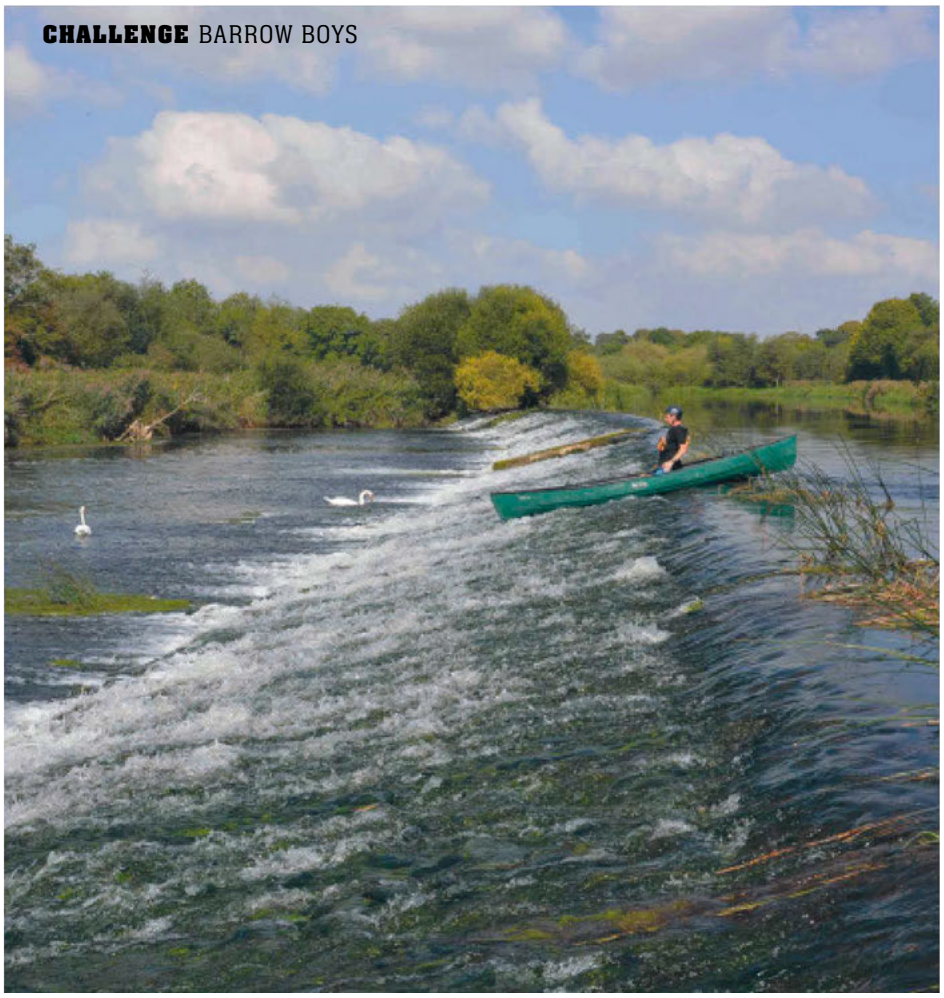
For most of its length, Ireland's River Barrow flows as smoothly as a perfectly poured stout. But a good river, like a decent pint is judged by the white frothy bits on the top – and that's where things get interesting when you're paddling a fully laden canoe with your septuagenarian dad at the helm, as PAT KINSELLA discovered.

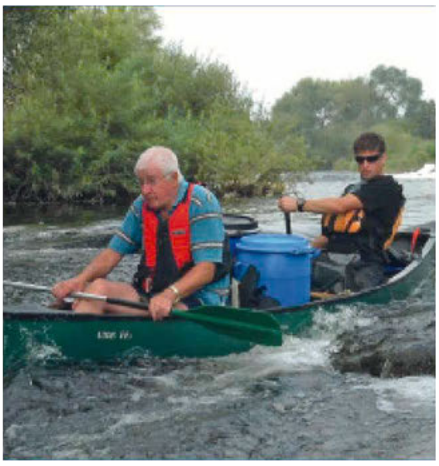
Words Pat Kinsella

As we clanged a couple of peat-black post-expedition pints together at the end of our 80-kilometre canoeing and camping caper along Ireland's River Barrow, Dad accused me of attempting euthanasia by stealth. Which was a bit rich, I thought, considering the whole escapade was his idea in the first place. Seventy-two years young, he reckoned to be knackered – but I hadn't seen him so alive for years. The big dopey grin on his face was as wide as the Guinness moustache above it. Had I really been trying to bump him off, this was evidently an awful way of doing it.

We'd just spent five quality days together, under surprisingly blue Irish skies, paddling through a historic and bucolic landscape, on a river that flows freely with a rich mix of myth, legend, wildlife and adventure. Overlooked for much of its length by the moody broody Blackstairs Mountains, which feed the river with streams, the Barrow wends through six counties in central Ireland, its serpentine course punctuated only by the odd town and occasional castle. Oh, and a shedload of weirs and a fair rake of rapids too. Dad wasn't so keen on those at the beginning, but we'd come to an understanding.

The Barrow – part of a trio of Irish waterways known as the Three Sisters, along with its smaller siblings the rivers Suir and Nore – has been modified by man over many centuries to suit needs such as fishing and





transportation. At its northern end it joins with the Grand Canal, an aquatic umbilicus connecting rural Ireland to Dublin, and it's navigable for its whole length. For some stretches of the waterway, canals with locks have been built parallel to the river, to allow larger boats to get around the more exciting spots, where submerged rocks lie in ambush and the flow gets steeper and wilder.

Our plan was to join the Barrow just below the junction with the Grand Canal, at Monasterevin, and to paddle downstream all the way to New Ross, where the river meets the saltwater of the Celtic Sea in an estuary that rises and falls with the tides. We would stick to the natural curves of the waterway for the duration, avoiding the locks and following the flow.

For each lock we bypassed, there was at least one weir to contend with. In a fully laden canoe, packed to the gunwales with camping equipment and supplies, this involved an interesting choice. Either we could, as Dad had made me promise, unload every damn thing out of the boat and portage the whole lot around. Or we could get out of the canoe and use the painters (ropes on the bow and stern of the canoe) to carefully lower it down into the whitewater in a controlled manner. Or we could throw caution to the wind and run the weir, risking capsize and calamity in the process.

Our sensible and unified approach to this conundrum remained rock solid on day one – during which we didn't encounter any weirs to test it. Which was fortunate, because we could ill afford to stand around and argue about whether we should portage or run them on that opening day. This was because we hadn't managed to get the canoe packed and to the put-in until early afternoon, and had to get to Athy before nightfall. After a couple of hours cooing over the kingfishers that kept skimming the river, stopping for photos and sorting out who was going to sit where in the boat, our leisurely paddling cadence suddenly had to increase in tempo to something approximating race pace with the belated realisation that the sunset was right on our tail.

It takes time to sync into a decent rhythm in a two-man canoe, especially when you haven't paddled together for a while. Muscles that we'd both allowed to get rusty were abruptly called back into action, and mentally I had to dig deep to recall the mechanics of the J-stroke – the pull with an outward kick that the rear paddler needs to employ in order to keep a canoe going straight.

Eventually, though, we got it dialled, and as we passed under the bridge beside the castle at Athy, it was still light enough to see the local Crossfit crew doing running reps and burpees on the banks, before finishing off their session by jumping into the river for a cool down. Every day we were on the Barrow we saw people running and riding along the towpath, or wild swimming in the river – a good sign, not only that the water's in good health, but that the outdoor fitness revolution is well underway in Ireland.

The Barrow is Ireland's second longest river, after the broad majestic Shannon. Dad grew up just outside of Limerick, quite literally on the banks of the Shannon, in a village called Corbally, where my Grandad built the family abode a little too close to the river. So close, in fact, that sometimes it came to visit them. His was a Huckleberry Finn–like childhood, spent messing about in boats, and occasionally wading around a house full of floodwater.

And it was Dad that instilled a love of larking about in the outdoors in me. He took me on annual hiking and camping trips when I was a kid, packed me off on a survival course in the Hebrides when I was 12 and always encouraged activities like kayaking.

With age, though, comes caution – and Dad was firmly of the opinion that we should portage the weirs. The weather was good, but not so hot that he wanted to take an involuntary swim every few kilometres, especially when we had so much gear with us. That resolve lasted for precisely one weir, the first one we came to after leaving Athy. After that, we discovered that each weir had a salmon run on it – a chute where the flow was faster but smoother than the surrounding cascade, which accommodated something the size of our canoe perfectly and was great fun to run. We still unloaded some of the gear, and Dad hopped out for the bigger drops, but shooting the weirs like this cut down on all the messing about that a full portage involved, and it upped the excitement level of the trip by several notches.

As the river passed through towns like Carlow, we often had an audience when we ran the weirs, upping the ante considerably, but despite a couple of close calls, we stayed the right way up and made good progress.

The second night we camped right by the lock gates in a picturesque spot called Milford, but the best experience was to come further downstream, along the river's wildest stretch, just after the beautiful village of Borris.

For this section we were joined by Charlie from Go With the Flow adventures. Charlie, who runs guided trips along the Barrow and rents out equipment to those who want to do it independently, had lent us the canoe, but he wanted to show us this part of the river personally. This I think was largely because he simply can't get enough of paddling this part of a river that he calls his "office". And I soon learned why.

Well away from any roads, the river here snakes around deep, steep, tree-lined banks and through the forest-filled grounds of a vast old mansion house owned for centuries by the MacMurrough Kavanagh family, one-time High Kings of Leinster. In the 19th century, one of family, Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh, an MP at Westminster, used to sail his yacht from here to London to attend parliament – despite the fact that he was severely disabled.

But it's not the history that gets Charlie excited about this bit of river. It's the rapids. Shooting weirs is one thing, but running real rapids is what canoeing is all about, and here the Barrow delivers in spades, with numerous submerged rock gardens, salmon traps and small drops to negotiate. Charlie brought along a few friends and we mixed it up, swapping boats and even jumping out of the canoes altogether and floating through some of the rapids on our backs.

After bidding Charlie and co farewell at Graiguenamanagh, we paddled on and made camp on a small island by the musical weir above St Mullins, the exact point where the river becomes tidal.

To catch the last of the outgoing tide, we launched long before dawn, and navigated the Guinness-dark water by headtorch for a couple of hours. Daybreak delivered us into a much-changed landscape, with the wide river now fringed by mudflats and populated by seabirds.

The tide turned before we could reach New Ross, but the Barrow had a last surprise in store before it let us go. Paddling hard against the incoming flow, we looked up to see a family of otters cavorting around in the water just a few feet ahead. They looked at us quizzically, and then carried on with their business, leaving us grinning all the way to the pull out.

Just before filing this story, I got an email from the old man. He has a question for me: Do you fancy a canoe trip down the River Shannon this summer? He's obviously developed a taste for this form of euthanasia.

■ Go With The Flow offer a range of options for people paddling the Barrow, from one-day fully guided experiences, through to arranging equipment and logistics (including drop off and pick up) for groups who want to explore the river independently. They also offer a range of other river trips and adventure experiences, gowiththeflow.ie or call +353 (0) 56 7801299 for more.

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Why: Stunning landscapes, wild loch-side camping, plenty of history and good facilities along the way.
greatglencanoetrail.info

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What: Britain's fifth-longest river rises in Wales and flows into England along a picturesque route, resplendent with wildlife and history.
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canoethewye.co.uk

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What: A national park encompassing 60 broads, ranging from little lakes to huge expanses of water such as Hickling Broad.
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canoethebroads.co.uk

4 THE THAMES

What: From its scenic origins in the Cotswolds, right through the big smoke and out to sea, the Thames wends through miles of traditional English countryside and cityscape.
Why: Many sections of England's most famous river offer excellent and safe canoeing conditions, with riverside campsites along the way. Pick a stretch - such as Cricklade to Lechlade, or Oxford to Windsor - or trace the entire 295-kilometre (184-mile) Thames Path.
thamescanoes.com

5 ULLSWATER CANOE TRAIL

What: Ullswater is the second largest lake in the Lake District.
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discover.edenriverstrust.org.uk

"I used to live a pretty unhealthy lifestyle. In 2007, when I was 33 it got to the point were I could hardly sleep at night. I was coughing and waking up because of the smoking."

STEVE'S WAY

From couch potato to representing his country, Steve Way talks takeaways, who inspires him and the best day of his life.

Words Damian Hall
Pictures addidas/marathonphotos.com/Lesley Martin

Every profile piece on Steve Way tells the same story and that's because it's an incredible one. *Outdoor Fitness* often features stories of beer-guzzling, chain-smoking, sofa-dwellers who turned their lives around, and rightly so, we applaud every one of you – but it's unlikely any have turned their lives quite like Steve Way has.

Way went from 16-and-a-half-stone, fast-food-quaffing, 20-a-day-smoking, self-confessed "fat bloke" to running the marathon for England at last year's Commonwealth Games. Not only that, but finishing 10th he set a new British veterans (over 40) record (beating Ron Hill's, which had stood since 1979), with a PB of 2:15:16. Steve also holds the British record for 100km (6:19:20).

To qualify for England's Commonwealth Games team Steve then aged 39 ran the 2014 London Marathon in 2:16:27, despite starting in the sub-2:45 runners' pen, about a minute behind the elite field. Also, he only decided to run the race eight days beforehand and the night before was spent in a campervan!

Way's is an amazing story that gives us all hope our best days may still be ahead of us. What can get overlooked when discussing his remarkable transformation is his modesty, his infectious enthusiasm for the sport, the meticulous attention to detail in his training, the many miles (upwards of 130 a week) he puts in and similarly the time he puts into trying to reply to all the posts on his website (steveway.co.uk). Sporting prowess aside, here is a man it's impossible not to like.

"My first memory of running isn't a good one. I remember trying to avoid running the second lap of my school cross-country!

I used to live a pretty unhealthy lifestyle. In 2007, when I was 33, it got to the point were I could hardly sleep at night. I was coughing and waking up because of the smoking. Half our meals were takeaways and I would eat chocolate and sweets all the time. I was overweight, almost 17 stone – I'm six foot – and smoking at least 20 cigarettes a day. I did no consistent exercise and a lot of my free time was just spent sat in front of the TV.

GETTING QUICKER, QUICKLY I ran the London Marathon in 2006, but I wasn't taking it seriously. I'd put a few weeks of unstructured training together and managed to run 3:07. At the time I didn't realise the significance of being able to run that fast on so little training and so I gave up running again!

It wasn't until September 2007 that I started training properly. I would say my first real breakthrough came at the Bath Half Marathon in 2008 when I unexpectedly ran it in 72 minutes and finished alongside the leading ladies. This was when I knew I was on to something.

From there my progress was quite quick, running a 2:35 marathon at London 2008 (I was aiming for a sub-3hr finish), 2:25 at London in 2009 and 2:19 in 2010. I felt awesome at the finish line of the 2014 London Marathon [where he ran 2:16:27 to qualify for the Commonwealth Games]! Knocking three minutes off my marathon PB meant the world to me and to come third Brit was just the icing on the cake. It makes all those months of training worthwhile.

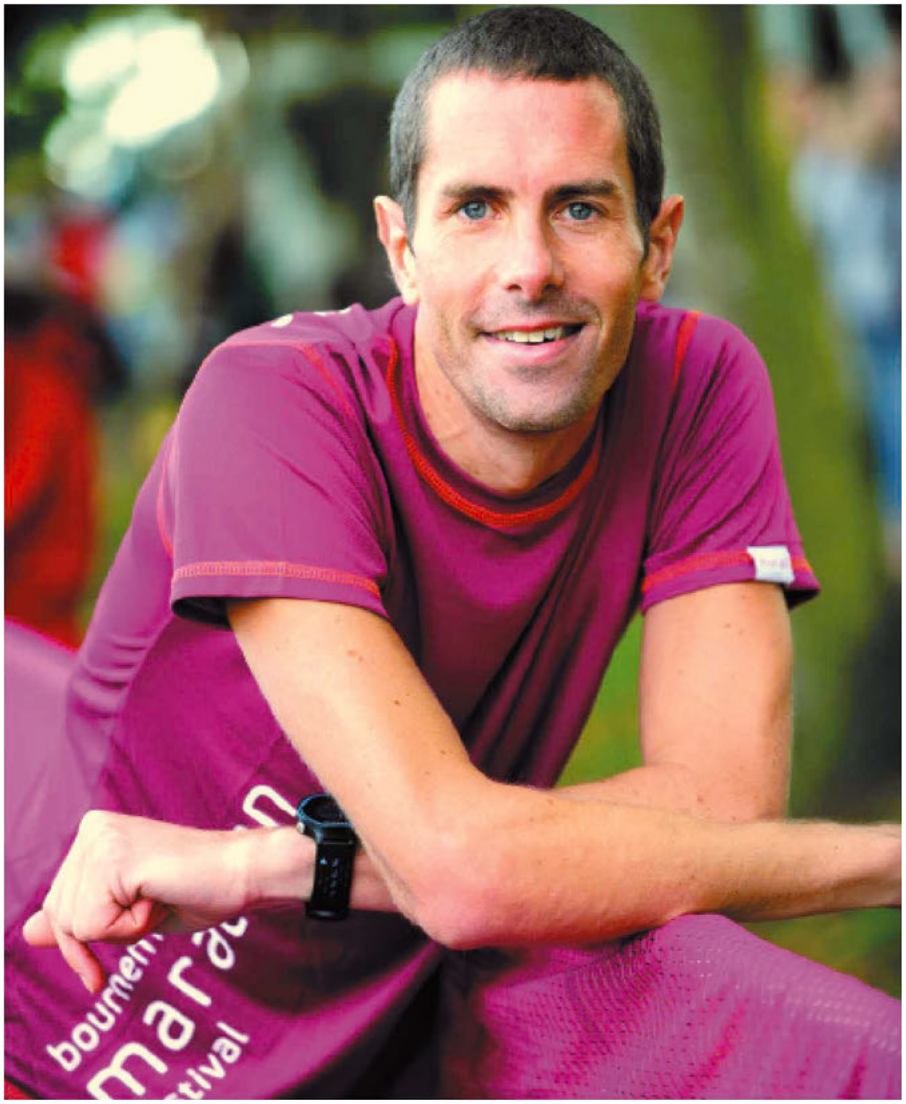
I had only decided to run the London Marathon eight days beforehand and that didn't do me any harm. By the time I got to the startline the nerves had kicked in, but I definitely spent the last week before the race in a more relaxed state, which has to be a good thing.

The Commonwealth Games was my best day ever. Getting a PB, a top 10 finish and breaking the British veteran marathon record was a dream come true. A very emotional day for me, and just rewards for seven years of hard training.

TRAINING APPETITE My appetite for training is bigger than my body can handle. One of the keys to success in this sport is knowing where your training limits are. My desire to train will always exceed my body's capabilities so getting that balance right is crucial. Racing is my passion. It's not so much the love of training itself but what it enables me to do on race day that I really enjoy. Being involved in a competitive sport is something I never thought I would really experience at this stage in my life, which makes it even more enjoyable.

MOTIVATION Self-improvement through PBs is one of my big motivators, along with setting myself big target races to focus on. This is what motivates me to get out running every day. As well as motivation through self-improvement I get motivation by recording all my racing and training statistics, so I can very closely monitor my progress and see improvements.

DIET I haven't done anything too complicated with my diet. Cutting out all the takeaways made a big difference for starters! Apart from just trying to eat a normal healthy diet with



minimal treats and snacks, one of the main differences now is I always have a big bowl of porridge for breakfast every day. My breakfast used to be a couple of cigarettes on the way to work!

MIND MATTERS If I'm ever finding it hard mentally in a race to give 100 percent, I try and remind myself of all of the weeks of hard training I have done in preparation. What's another few minutes of pain compared to all the sacrifices I have made every day in training?

I still don't cope with injuries and setbacks well it has to be said. When I can't run through injury I find it hard to motivate myself to stay healthy. I'm not that keen on any other form of exercise, so I find it hard to motivate myself to keep fit. I'm also more likely to start eating 'naughty' foods when I'm not training. Fortunately I haven't had that many injuries recently.

I prefer to work in jobs where I only have a well-structured 9-5 with very little stress and no requirements for overtime. It doesn't pay as well as my previous job in IT, but my clerical work's a lot better when trying to run 140 miles a week. I also have no kids and a very understanding wife, which helps.

TALENT? Is my talent innate, or down to good old-fashioned hard work? A bit of both I think. I don't really have any raw speed relative to other 2:15 marathon runners, but I have enough that when you combine it with my training ethic and hard work it can produce good results. I also think part of my 'talent' is having a body which is capable of withstanding the training I ask it to do. There aren't many people whose bodies could cope with the mileage and intensity I do.

INSPIRATIONS I find Paula Radcliffe and the Brownlee Brothers very inspiring, for very similar reasons. They are not only the best at what they do but they achieve it through no-nonsense training and hard work.

In fact the evening before the Commonwealth Games marathon, Alistair Brownlee gave me the best bit of running advice I'd ever received: 'It's only running' he said, which put the next day's events into perspective and calmed me down!"

■ **Steve Way is an adidas running ambassador, join the conversation @adidasUK and share your running journey using #fromwhereirun.**

"If I'm ever finding it hard mentally in a race to give 100 percent, I try and remind myself of all of the weeks of hard training I have done in preparation. What's another few minutes of pain compared to all the sacrifices I have made every day in training?"

"There aren't many people whose bodies could cope with the mileage and intensity I do."

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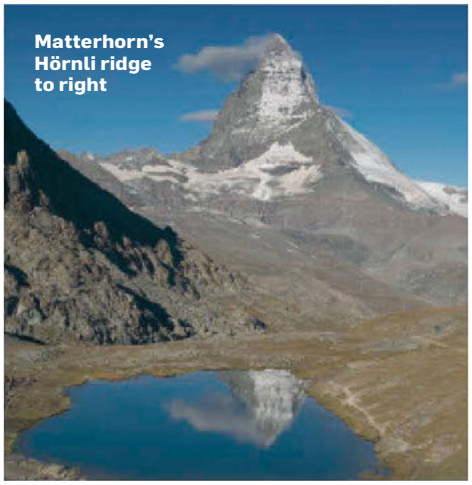
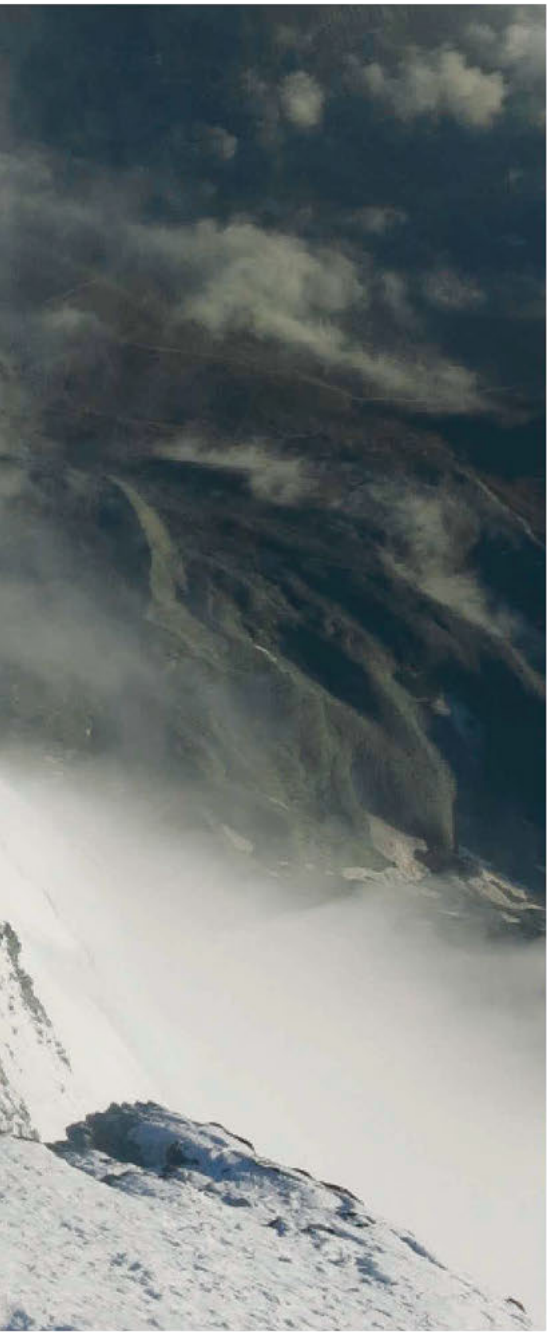
The climb

SKY HIGH



Matterhorn's Hörnli ridge to right



Ed Douglas set out to conquer a lifelong ambition – climbing the iconic Matterhorn.

Words Ed Douglas **Pictures** Alex Messenger

Michal Sekelsky shone his head-torch into my face and asked me a simple question: "Ready?" It was 3.30am and still very dark but I'd already had breakfast and couldn't think of anything else I needed to do. Looming over us was the vast pyramid of the Matterhorn and our line of ascent – the Hörnli Ridge. I'd been thinking for years about this moment, when everything – weather, fitness and experience – would come together and I'd leave for the summit. That moment was now. "Ready." I told him. "Let's go."

I was still full of doubts. There was a keen wind blowing out of the northwest and wisps of cloud. How was that going to feel at 4,000 metres? I wondered about the snow and ice plastering the mountain's upper slopes. How hard would that make the climb? Was I really fit enough? But Michal was my guide and I trusted him. If he said we were good to try, then so be it. I soon found a rhythm walking up to the base of the ridge and all doubts faded away. It was time.

The Matterhorn is an icon. It towers over the Swiss mountain village of Zermatt, isolated and magnificent. Hand a child a crayon and a blank piece of paper and ask them to draw a mountain, and they'll produce something that looks very similar. And the mountain's history is as dramatic as its landscape. In the Victorian era, Zermatt was the centre for the new sport of alpinism, and its most famous names were British.

One by one the summits towering above Zermatt, like the Weisshorn and the Zinal Rothorn, fell to the founders of the Alpine Club. Only the Matterhorn remained unclimbed, despite repeated attempts. It became the obsession of an engraver from Lambeth called Edward Whymper, and its first ascent 150 years ago was a landmark in mountaineering, a tragic conclusion to what has been dubbed the Golden Age of alpinism.

Descending from the summit, one of his companions, a young novice called Douglas Hadow, slipped and fell, dragging three more with him. The rope joining the falling men to Whymper and his two Swiss guides came tight – and then broke. The four men disappeared into the abyss of the mountain's north face. Their deaths caused a sensation but also put Zermatt on the map. The combination of natural grandeur and a good story made the Matterhorn the most famous mountain in the world.

IT'S NOT A GOOD START....

Arriving in Zermatt a week before our attempt, everything seemed against us. The weather forecast was hopeless and the mountain was out of condition. Despondent, we sat in Grampi's, a pizzeria named after a distinctive gully on the Matterhorn's east face. "Grampis" are also what Zermatt guides call amateur climbers, often British, who get stuck on the mountain. It felt like an omen.

At the next table was Richard Branson, celebrating the successful conclusion of his son Sam's "Strive" charity challenge. This involved a core team of ten athletes, including former Wimbledon champion Marion Bartoli, running from London to the south coast, rowing the Channel, cycling to the Alps and then hiking from Verbier to Zermatt. The climax was an ascent of the Matterhorn.

Sam was one of three from the team who made the summit but had then been helicoptered off, suffering a combination of altitude sickness and exhaustion. He still seemed a little stunned when I asked him about his experience. "I'd done Mont Blanc a couple of years ago," he told me. "But in hindsight that's not even a climb." Branson had trained in Chamonix on routes like the Cosmiques Arete on the Aiguille du Midi, but the Matterhorn had clearly been a step up.

Branson hadn't been helped by conditions. On days of fine weather in the climbing season, from late June to early September, over 100 people reach the summit. 2014 was different. Thick cloud blanketed the mountain for much of the summer; by the time I arrived in early September, Zermatt's guides reckoned that only 50 people had climbed the mountain that summer. And not one of them had been a Zermatt guide.

PREPARATION

"Conditions have to be right," Andreas Perren told me. Andreas is 45, and one of the senior active guides in Zermatt. He's climbed the Matterhorn over 150 times and one of his forebears was on the fateful first ascent. "The Matterhorn is a rock climb. That's the main reason it wasn't climbed over the summer." When the Hörnli Ridge is warm rock, he told me, it's pleasant scrambling but under ice and snow it becomes a more challenging proposition.

Uppermost in any guide's mind is the descent. As the sun climbs and temperatures rise, snow and ice near the summit begins to melt, making the climb down hazardous. You have to be up and down before that happens. And even if the ridge is clear of snow, speed is essential. The longer you're up there, the slower you go and the longer you take. The message is simple - the key to the Matterhorn is speed.

"When someone comes to me wanting to climb the Matterhorn," Andreas said, "I first ask them if they've climbed other mountains, particularly 4,000m peaks, and how long ago. I recommend they do a preparation climb with me, to see how fit they are and how well they climb – to see if they're strong enough for the Matterhorn."

Our first training climb was 600 feet of sun-kissed granite on the Riffelhorn, a rock peak of around 2,900 metres. Andreas wanted to know if we could move fast at a standard

slightly above that of the Matterhorn in our big mountaineering boots. He also had us practising climbing down facing out, a much faster method than laboriously facing the mountain, but scary to someone unused to it. We also practised using a thick fixed rope just like the one on the final difficult rock tower near the Matterhorn's summit, a critical piece of infrastructure that makes the mountain that little bit easier – and safer.

Two days later I was following Andreas across the Breithorn, a dizzying but relatively safe traverse with some impressive drops on either side. It was a good test of whether I felt comfortable on an exposed ridge. As we approached the summit at 4,000m, he quickened his pace, testing my fitness and acclimatisation. My heart rate leaped, but it seemed the days I'd spent hiking high above Zermatt had paid off. I matched his pace and he announced I was ready.

THE CLIMB

Late in the afternoon before our climb, I caught the cable car up to Schwarzee and contoured around to the base of the Hörnli ridge. Normally, climbers stay in a mountain hut and start climbing next day. Now the hut was a construction site, undergoing renovation ahead of this year's anniversary celebrations. We would have to start from a temporary camp more than a thousand feet lower.

Early next morning, after three or four hours sleep, Michal, my new Slovakian guide, was leading the way to the base of the ridge. Once we had roped up, we didn't stop, scrambling up the easier, lower section helpfully tucked out of the wind on the east face. The first section is done in the dark so my world became a small pool of light picking out crampon scratches and polished holds as we scrambled up on largely solid holds. In three hours we reached the small emergency Solvay hut at 4,000m on the crest of the ridge – and felt the full force of the wind.

Despite this, I felt strong and happy to continue. The sun was rising behind a thin veil of mist giving me a surge of optimism. Above the Solvay, we reached the crest of the ridge, an incredible exposed spot, with the steep north face disappearing into the shadows beneath our feet on one side, and the sunlit east face on the other. Conditions were bitterly cold, but we were moving fast and I felt no hesitation in continuing.

The final tower above our heads loomed a little, but with my guide Michal's help, it proved a fitting climax to an incredible mountaineering challenge. Equipped with stretches of thick fixed rope and good anchors, it's much safer now than it was in 1865, but the fate of those four climbers was never far from my mind. Reaching the narrow summit ridge after so many doubts and setbacks felt unreal, like stepping into space. It was around 9am and I felt elated beyond words. At the summit Michal and I hugged each other and we stared for a while at the surrounding peaks with just one thought left – a safe descent.

HOW FIT DO YOU NEED TO BE?

Success or failure on the Matterhorn most often comes down to fitness and acclimatisation. If you're going to the expense of hiring a guide then it makes sense to give yourself the best chance. "The climbing itself is not so difficult for most people," Andreas Perren says. "People fail because they're not fit enough." He recommends coming to Zermatt in good mountaineering shape and being prepared to spend at least a week acclimatising properly. At 4,478m, the Matterhorn is among the highest mountains in the Alps and it takes time to adjust. I had spent ten days in Zermatt before climbing the peak, and almost all of those days were spent either climbing or hill walking, with a couple of visits to 4,000 metres. There are some great peaks that can be climbed safely without ropes that offer good acclimatisation, like the Mettelhorn above the Trift valley. From Zermatt that's 1,700m of ascent, a good test of fitness.

WHAT SKILLS DO I NEED?

If you've got lots of experience walking and scrambling in the mountains of Britain, can do easy rock climbs up to VDiff or Severe in standard* and have experience using ice and crampons, then the Matterhorn is possible. But expect a local guide to interrogate you. They will want to know what you've done in the Alps in general but more particularly in the Zermatt region. If you haven't done a 4,000-metre peak in the Valais, then they will quite likely not take you on the Matterhorn.

There are British guiding companies offering packages that offer the right preparation (jagged-globe.co.uk/climb/course/i/alps+matterhorn.html), but again, if they don't think you're ready, they won't let you on the route. Much of the Matterhorn requires you to climb simultaneously with your guide and they want to know you're up to the job.

* VDiff or Severe are the easiest rock-climbing grades.

WHAT GEAR IS BEST?

Given how fast you're required to move on the Matterhorn you want the lightest gear and to carry as little as possible. I was wearing Smartwool thermals, Patagonia soft-shell pants and jacket and Arc'teryx's Alpha SL hard shell. I had a very light Black Diamond Vemon ice axe and their excellent Vapour helmet. All of this clothing and gear is incredibly light and made a real difference to my speed. For boots I used my old La Sportiva Nepal Extreme boots; these are very warm but are now quite heavy compared to modern options. Take spare gloves in case you drop one as I did while using my camera. I carried a small thermos of herb tea and had Jelly babies in my jacket pocket for those rare moments when we stopped.

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

Contact the British Mountaineering Council for advice on starting climbing, thebmc.co.uk/

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Hang on

If you want to scale obstacles as if they were not there when you take on your next obstacle course then you'll need good upper body strength.

ROPE CLIMBING IS a great way to develop this strength and to gain confidence with heights – not that you'll be climbing to 30-feet, the height required for Royal Marine Commando training (that's unless the organisers of the Tough Guy or Tough Mudder, for example are reading this!). Marines have to make that 30-foot climb carrying 31lbs of kit, in combat boots and whatever the weather!

Here's how to rope climb the Marines' way:

1 Start with your arms fully extended and hands gripping the rope.

2 Jump and pull, to get your knees up to your hands; this will result in you leaning back from the rope, with head back.

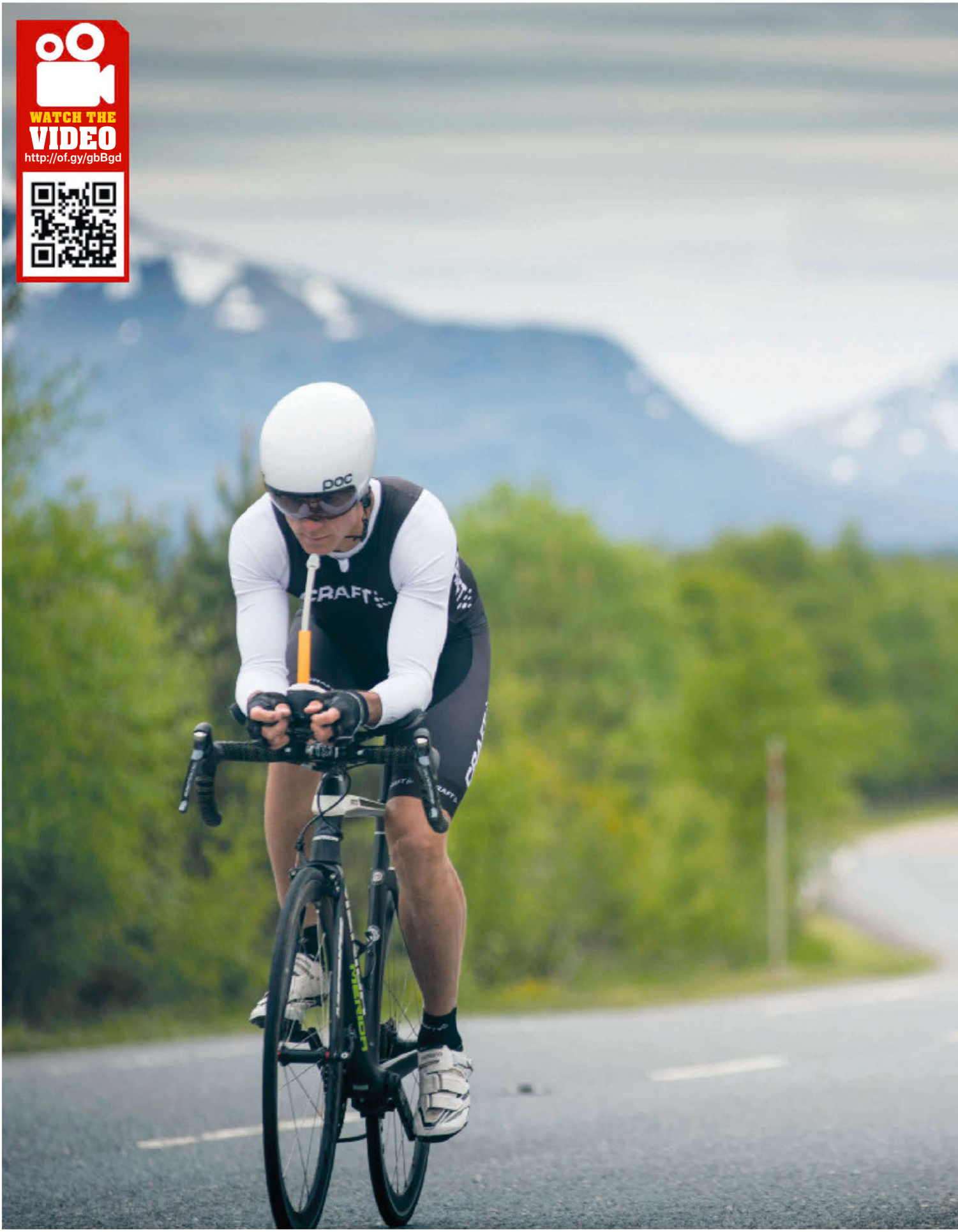
3 Grip the rope between your knees and your feet. Your lower legs are crossed – the rope should dissect the front shin and the rear calf of front and rear legs respectively, and its squeezed between the feet.

4 Really gripping through your legs and feet you should achieve an "L" shape as you extend your legs to parallel to the ground. The rope will now be firm between the insides of your knees.

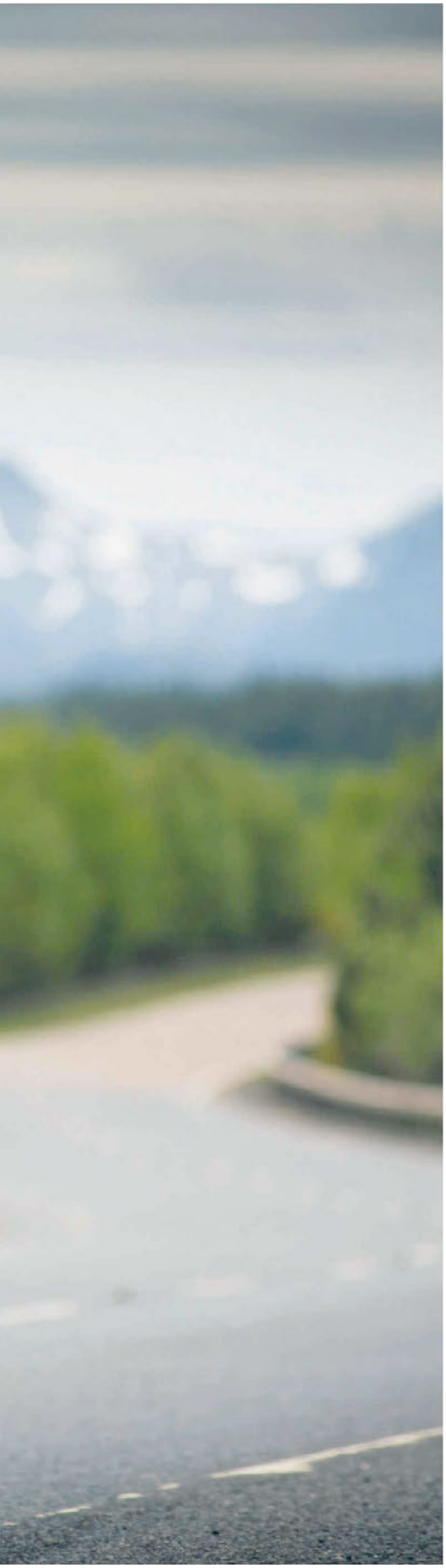
5 With legs locked, reach as high as possible with your arms and re-grip the rope.

6 Let go of the rope with your legs and repeat (remembering to throw your head back and re-grip the rope with your legs as you get the knees close to your hands).

■ **Rope climb technique adapted from Royal Marines Fitness - Physical Training Manual, Haynes Publishing, Haynes.co.uk**



Words Sean McFarlane **Pictures** Andy McCandlish



Braveheart Tri Plan

Bike advice and training plan 2

So you've signed up for (or are going to) this epic challenge as sponsored by this magazine, with its run up and down Britain's highest mountain. You may be worried about how to prepare and what you'll encounter, well fear not as we continue our recce and training plan.

THE BIKE LEG is a straightforward out and back loop. Fort William at 9:30am on a Saturday morning in October is usually pretty quiet, but the first section does head out through the North West side of the town. In order to best deal with any traffic and some traffic lights at the start of the bike course, the organisers have a created a "time out" section which is important to bear in mind and will work as follows: as you leave transition, your race time will stop and won't start again until you reach the BP garage on the outskirts of town 3.25km from transition. At this point your race time will be reactivated. When you return to this point, there is a distillery opposite the BP garage and here once again your race time will be stopped, with your remaining journey to transition being a time out. Your race time will be reactivated once you enter transition. This ensures a safe start and end to the bike course. I would advise however against a very leisurely spin out to the BP garage. It's important to start your race systems and I also suspect you'll need to warm up. On top of that, although it is a time out section you do have a limit of 10 minutes to get to the garage from transition and the same applies when you return.

Once you reach Spean Bridge after 17km you will be directed right along the A96. You continue on that road passing by the shores of Loch Laggan on your right with the magnificent Creag Meagaidh mountain looking on approvingly to your left. As the Cairngorms come into view to the front and you reach the head of the loch, you'll eventually reach a car park on your left hand side where you will turn and return to transition along the same route. The road surfaces are good, and as the course gradually climbs on the way out remember that the prevailing wind here is usually (though not always) from the west.

More info, bennevisbraveheart.co.uk/bike.html

PLAN BIKE AND KIT CHOICE, NUTRITION AND RACE PLANNING

Before you even start to turn the pedals, you should have already made some key decisions, which will have a crucial effect on your race. You'll have carefully considered your choice of bike and set up (see later). Kit choice is also vital; the outward leg gradually gains height so you should warm up relatively quickly, but do pay attention to the weather conditions and prepare accordingly. There's no chance to come back to transition during the bike leg so be sure to take everything you need.

It may be a cliché but you do, more than ever, have to race your own race here. This bike leg is all about getting round as quickly as possible whilst at the same time ensuring you return to transition as ready as you can be for a half marathon up and down Britain's highest mountain. Resist the temptation to hammer past the lines of bikers clearly visible ahead. But at the same time don't be afraid to push on if you feel you can do so without significantly compromising your running ability. Of course it's a very difficult balance to get right and one that is at the core of the triathlon challenge.

Then there's nutrition which is an essential factor that mustn't be overlooked, but often is. The bike represents the best opportunity in the race to safely take on the nutrition you need, so use it to do just that. Three fundamental tips here: firstly confirm exactly where the aid stations are and what is at them, there's no point carrying more than you need; secondly make sure you have tested and are happy with your nutrition in advance of race day; and thirdly check you can safely carry all that you need and access it whilst riding.

Use the last few kilometres of the bike to begin to spin the legs more and start to think about the run. Check how your nutrition feels and if necessary top up with liquid but resist the temptation to do any last minute gorging. Your stomach won't thank for you for that as you start the run. Let the fun commence...!

More info, and how to enter, bennevisbravheart.co.uk

whatever bike you chose, getting a professional bike fit is well worth it.

Bike Choice

With the huge increase in both road biking and triathlons it's a safe bet that most of us have recently had to consider what to think about when it comes to choosing a bike. Nowadays it no longer seems to be a choice of just one bike and with the rise of the "extreme" triathlons, an interesting debate has ensued, namely speed versus comfort. But can you have both?

Most of us, if we have sufficient funds, will opt for or at the very least be very tempted by a time trial bike. We see pictures of super triathletes in Kona and footage of Sir Brad and think "Yup, that'll do me". But, as always, choosing the kit of professional athletes in an attempt to emulate them is never that simple and, in the case of time trial bikes, can lead to all sorts of complications.

I'm regularly amazed at the number of people who turn up to triathlons with fancy time trial bikes and tell me they've "test ridden" them for an hour or so the week before. They then race, finish the bike leg in serious discomfort and as a result are able to do little more than crawl around the run. The problem of discomfort during the bike leg leading to a poor run is a particular problem in longer races such as half or full Ironman triathlons. It's even more of an issue in the new extreme triathlons where the runs are off road and involve a mountain or two. I've made this very mistake myself and on more than one occasion. Where the run is lengthy and over difficult ground, the last thing you want to do is come off the bike in discomfort. Perhaps you can battle through a 5km run but try doing that over a marathon with mountains and you're

in for a whole world of trouble.

Faced with a choice of comfort over speed during the bike leg of an extreme triathlon, I'd always go for comfort. For two straightforward reasons: firstly if you are comfortable you're far more likely to bike faster as you will be able to sustain more effort for longer; secondly you'll give yourself a much better chance of running well over challenging terrain.

So what's the answer? Simple: an aero road bike with tri bars. Last year's Celtman winner did just that, smashing the course record by over twenty minutes in the process. He had the fastest bike split of the day with the second fastest split also going to a competitor with the same set up. Aero road bikes have evolved significantly over recent years. There's also a range of tri bars available with a wide selection of positions to choose from so spend time considering the options here as well. It all means that you can get yourself a very fast and comfortable set up for triathlons whilst also having a road bike for general riding. Aero bikes tend to be slightly heavier than "normal" road bikes but what you lose in weight you more than gain in cutting through wind resistance.

You do have to carefully consider the course involved; with the aero bike and tri bars set up being far more suited to relatively hilly bike legs, offering as it does a better range of positions more suited to climbing and descending. If you are used to time trialling I would be more reluctant to make a change, but at least experiment if at all possible.

With whatever bike you choose to use, getting a professional bike fit is well worth it. Like so many things that are worth doing, it's worth doing properly. So avoid at all costs doing it half-heartedly and just getting a few measurements; that's guaranteed to cause you more harm than good. Trust me, I've done just that and paid the price. Instead take the time and spend the (relatively small amount of) money to get it done thoroughly. Do this much sooner rather than later as any changes need time to bed in. Be prepared to make changes gradually and don't be put off by initial discomfort.

Pay particular attention to your saddle. So many of us cite this as being one of the main areas of discomfort so make sure you take time and advice on this. Saddle fitting is now available and helps enormously as do the many creams and lubricants available. The other issue here can be race shorts. Many of us train in bibs which typically have more padding than race shorts so make sure you've practised and are happy with your race shorts.

BRAVEHEART TRAINING PLAN 2

Remember that this plan represents the best-case scenario and, as we all know, life can get in the way of proper training. Don't panic at all if you miss anything, but do try to take advantage of our long summer evenings and get out when you can.

DISCIPLINE	GENERAL POINTS	SESSIONS	AIM	ALTERNATIVES
SWIM	With summer now in full swing, make use of any open water swimming locations you can. Pool work is still important to focus on for technique but this time of year represents a chance to get out and really start to enjoy your swimming.	**Open water:** look to build the distance here. Ideally you should be aiming to swim 1km in relative comfort.	Get used to open water swimming in general. Also begin to focus on proper sighting.	Continue to get in the water and raise the heart rate. As before, things like windsurfing, surfing and kayaking are all great. Enjoy your exposure to open water.
		Pool work: ongoing technique.	Continue to work on good form. I tend to keep these sessions short from now on (1 hour maximum) as I much prefer open water swimming at this time of year.	Look at some gentle gym conditioning work, and also stretching. Sessions involving yoga, Pilates and circuit type activities are all very useful here.
BIKE	Most of us are now aiming to build some solid biking fitness. Look to experiment with bike nutrition and make a note of what works and what doesn't. Also try to do some running straight after at least one of these sessions. Focus on running for as long it takes to find your rhythm. We all know that running initially off a bike can feel strange but things do quickly settle down so practise running until you find that point.	**Steady distance:** up to 80km.	Getting used to at least 3 hours of biking.	Continue with mountain biking if that suits. Don't forget to have fun so stop for a coffee and cake and learn to love summer road riding in the UK. It's not difficult.
		40/50km structured ride: This can be in the form of a chain gang, solid group ride or make up your own: 10 minute warm up then 4 x 20 minute efforts involving 15 minutes at race pace or slightly beyond and 5 minutes easy recovery. Finish with 10 minutes recovery riding or however long it takes you to get back home!	Get used to varying heart rate and gear changing. Also work on the possible need to sustain effort for a set period during the race, perhaps to overtake a cluster of other competitors.	
RUN	As we increase the running load, be mindful of how your body reacts. Continue to experiment with shoes but be ready to make a decision soon. Experiment with nutrition on your longer runs and how best to carry it.	**8km mixed terrain**	Continue to work on good running form. Look at adding some short efforts (perhaps 3 minutes on with 90 seconds recovery) and make a note of how your body reacts.	Sports/deep tissue massages can be very beneficial as the intensity of your training increases. But rather than lying on a soft table being pampered for an hour, my rule is that you shouldn't be able to fall asleep for fear of imminent pain, even if it seldom arrives. To treat it as a workout it needs to be one, so make sure you use someone who knows how to "get in there"!
		10-15k off road: off road/ gentle hill run.	Get more and more used to uneven surfaces and varying gradients. Work on quick feet for descending and technical terrain. Take the chance to discover new routes. Get a map and explore what's on your doorstep.	

Between the posts

Want to beat your mates in a road sprint? Team GB sprint ace Philip Hindes gives *Outdoor Fitness* a masterclass.

IT'S JUST AN ordinary terraced house in a leafy Manchester suburb, and on the surface there's nothing to indicate that two of Britain's best cyclists live here. But step inside and the clues pour in.

For starters there's the incredible coffee machine and grinder in the kitchen whose Rolls Royce nature is somewhat at odds with the house's otherwise modest stature. Joining the grinder as another sleek machine and the biggest clue of all - the £20k-plus handmade carbon one-of-a-kind German team track frame under the dining room table. Then there's the bike stand and bucket on the patio (even pros still have to adjust their chains and clean their bikes), the intricately detailed training spreadsheets cluttering the sideboard and, of course, the wealth of shirts, socks, shoes, shades and riding gear on most available surfaces.

In TV's Through the Keyhole style, the clues add up to sprint cyclist Philip Hindes - 2012 Olympic gold winner with Chris Hoy and Jason Kenny in the team sprint - and Team GB and Team Wiggins' ace Andy Tennant. But it's Hindes I've come to see today in search of more sprinting fire on the road, specifically when sprinting between lampposts.

For the uninitiated, lamppost sprinting, or indeed any sprinting between obvious road markers (trees, signs, etc) is a stalwart in the serious cyclist's performance armoury. Head out on the weekend club ride and there will usually be a sprint or two en route allowing natural competition to push all concerned beyond their limits in a perfect threshold effort, which, followed by a riding recovery, works wonders for increasing speed, strength and stamina. Oh, and it's a right laugh.

I've got to know Hindes since he became one my nutrition company's ambassadors (33Shake natural sports nutrition): I've picked his brains on cycling performance to help my own shambling efforts. After all, it's not everyday you get to chat with Olympic gold medal winning cyclists. When I asked about building sprint speed, Hindes immediately suggested lampposts, or in his case, road signs.

"Growing up in Germany (Hindes was born and raised there but his father's a Brit so he has held dual nationality all his life), we would do what's called an 'ortschild sprint' all the time with the club," he explains. "Translated this means

Words Warren Pole **Pictures** Ben Winston

GREAT BRITAIN

"town sign sprint" and it was always the big effort on the Saturday road rides where everyone just goes for it. We'd all know it was coming up and as soon as we could see that sign, that was it, everyone was off! Everyone attacks and it ends up in a big sprint. There would be about 15 riders fighting it out and laughing afterwards, we all really looked forward to it."

One suspects Hindes looked forward to it more than most because even back then, his raw sprinting talent was showing through. "I had no technique, I just went for it and I used to win quite a lot". Although he does admit that winning came at a price saying: "I wasn't very good on the hills though".

Technology has now also helped spread interest in "DIY road sprinting" as Strava sections appear all over the place where folks set out to beat one another. While fitness is nice and speed is even better, there's nothing quite like the sweet satisfaction of beating your mates, virtual or otherwise. So with notebook in hand and ears wide open, I step outside to join Hindes saddling up and head out into the local lanes to learn everything I can.

Knowing I'll be outgunned on all levels, I've taken the precaution of coming to this shindig well tooled up with a brand new Bianchi Oltre XR2, loaned by the kind folks at Bianchi UK who have clearly taken pity on me. In Grand Tour spec and boxfresh, it gleams like a new scalpel and leaps down the road at the lightest of inputs like an eager pedigree pooch straining at the leash, which is more than can be said for the rider.

Hindes on the other hand has no such worries, armed as he is with a sprinting engine capable of making him the fastest man in the world around a velodrome on a standing start single lap. He'd smash me on a Raleigh Grifter with flat tyres! Plus he has those legs. You know the ones. Chris Hoy has the same sort and they do an incredible magic-trick. At rest, in a pair of jeans, they are innocuous as could be - just some normal legs, nothing to see here. But slide these very same pins into a pair of cycling tights and boom! You're confronted with legs that look as if Marvel Comics just drew them for a superhero. It's an astounding trick forged through years of dedication; sprinting so hard you routinely vomit (all in a day's work if you're trying), and squatting the combined weight of an entire primary school class pretty much daily.

■ **Philip Hindes uses 33Shake natural sports nutrition to fuel his training, racing and recovery, 33shake.com**

'Hindes on the other hand has no such worries, armed as he is with a sprinting engine capable of making him the fastest man in the world around a velodrome on a standing start single lap. He'd smash me on a Raleigh Grifter with flat tyres! '

The lesson begins...

On arrival at a suitable spot complete with handy trees, we set to work.

BODY POSITION "You want a good firm grip with your hands and make sure they're around the centre of the curve in the drops," instructs Hindes. "You need the perfect combination of maximum leverage and an easy reach to the gear levers. As you'll be doing a rolling start for a sprint like this you'll want to stand up to fire up the speed and chances are you'll stay out of the saddle right until you've crossed the finish".

WHATEVER YOU DO, AERODYNAMICS ARE KEY "Get the upper body as low as you comfortably can but be careful not to constrict the chest – you need all the oxygen you can get for this. Keep your arms bent but make sure they're as tucked in as possible".

WHILE AERODYNAMICS ARE ESSENTIAL, YOU'LL STILL NEED TO MOVE AROUND ON THE BIKE "You have to be dynamic for a good sprint. Be agile and fluid on the bike, not like a stone. On the track I move the bike less, I tend to move myself around it instead to really focus all the energy on going forwards, but on the road it's different. You can throw the bike around more, which makes it harder for people to pass you.

WHAT ABOUT GEAR SELECTION? "You don't want to use anything too big," Hindes cautions. "Ideally you're looking for a cadence of about 80rpm right before you start the sprint, spinning up to around 100-110rpm at top speed. Bear in mind you may need to change gear to maintain this".

With a head now full of world-class sprinting knowledge, I join Hindes for some practical work racing for a bright red post box at the roadside. I roll in, pour on the coals as hard as I can while working on body position, aerodynamics and even almost getting there with the cadence and gearing. It feels good. Hell, it even feels fast. It's clearly nowhere near enough to stop Hindes disappearing like the Millennium Falcon on overdrive however, whilst barely appearing to exert himself.

"Not bad for a first effort," he says cheerily and with no hint of breathlessness as I slump over the bars going roughly the same colour as the post box we've just passed. However, this sort of behaviour is to be expected if you go cycling with riders of Hindes' calibre and behind my obvious defeat lies triumph because for the first time my spindly legs feel a hint of sprinting shazam.

I continue my masterclass under Hindes' watchful eye as he irons out assorted issues from fingers that waver around brake levers for no good reason, and a head that wants to bob up into the air far more than it should.

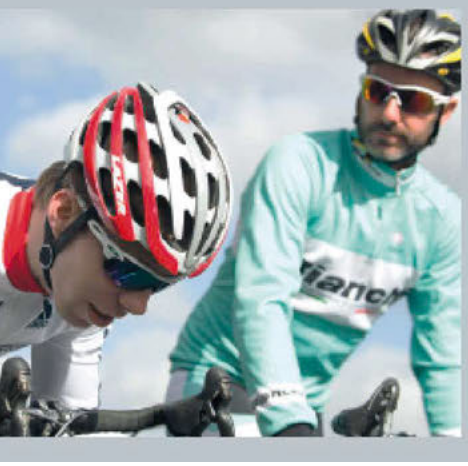
USE TECH For maximum bang for your practicing buck when working on your own sprint, use tech as chances are you won't have an Olympic champ at the roadside yelling encouragement.

"Your first step is to find online videos of the world's best sprinters in action, ideally ones with slow-motion sections and analyse how they do it. Then head out with a friend and have them video you as you ride – now you can compare the two and see where you can improve. This can be really valuable because you might not be doing what you think you're doing and the camera never lies!

"It can also help to practise the sprinting movements in a smaller gear at slower speed just to work on the process and technique without exhausting yourself."

GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES (FAST!) With well worked legs and the great feeling of real exhaustion from fully emptying the tank, for me at least, we roll back to the house and on the way Hindes has one more top sprinting tip – a trip to his spiritual home, the velodrome. He explains: "Riding on the track helps any rider improve. Sessions there will help you pedal more smoothly, reach higher speeds and pedal with a higher cadence for longer".

Put this lot together and your mates won't stand a chance. Happy sprinting.



PHILIP HINDES, THE MAKING OF A MODERN SPRINTER

"I tried every sport as a kid. I started ice speed skating at nine and played ice hockey too. Then I got into rowing but by the time I was a teenager I wasn't tall enough, so I looked at cycling. I loved watching the Tour de France and really wanted a bike, but my parents thought it was a phase, so wouldn't buy me one. Fortunately my uncle gave me his old bike, an ancient steel Peugeot and I started riding with the local club. I was still rowing, but on my bike I felt so much more freedom, so I dropped rowing completely.

In Germany we have sporting academies where you can specialise in certain sports while also doing academic studies, and I managed to get a place at a school in East Germany that was really good for track cycling. There's no history of cycling in my family but I was seeing real results and made the German junior sprint team where I set a world record and came fourth in the world overall.

But in Germany there's no national coaching, it's only regional. I knew I had to come to Britain if I wanted to improve, and with my dad being British, this was totally possible. I was also lucky because my coach at school had been Jan van Eijden who was by then coaching the Team GB sprinters. I made contact with him and he arranged for me to come over to the UK for a trial in late 2010. I was 18 then, the youngest you can be to join the British Cycling Academy. The tests went well and with the Olympics just 18 months away the coaches thought I had the potential to develop into the first man role for the team sprint.

It was a crazy time. Chris Hoy was one of my all-time heroes because he won everything and now here I was suddenly training and racing with him. I was really nervous the first time but I need not have worried as he made it very easy, as he's so down to earth.

It was quite easy for me to keep my focus in the build up to the Olympics. I was just doing my job and didn't know for sure I'd even be racing as Ross Edgar and I were fighting for the "man one" spot until three weeks before the race. This meant I didn't have the build up to London like the rest of the guys. No one knew me; all I had to focus on was my cycling. It felt pretty normal, like any other race, except when you got into the village and realised it was the Olympics! Winning gold was incredible and now I just want to win more. It's an addiction. I'm still just 22, so I've only just got going!"

Lunch break workout

Desk-bound all day? Make the most of your lunch break with these quick and easy workouts. All you need is a little space in a local park.

Words Dominic Bliss **Pictures** James Carnegie **Expert** Christopher Smith

WORKOUT PROTOCOL

■ This workout is designed to be high-intensity, and mixes cardio with bodyweight resistance exercises. This combo will burn serious numbers of calories, both during and after the workout, as your metabolism stays elevated. It'll also boost your aerobic endurance and anaerobic local muscular fitness.

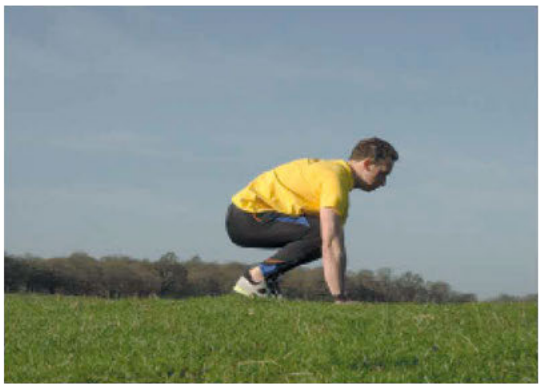
■ Do as many reps as you can in the time allocated (unless otherwise indicated), making sure you keep to good form. Take 20 seconds recovery between exercises or move straight from one to the next if you're fit enough. Do two to five circuits depending on your fitness and time available.

■ Always warm up before your workout. Do five to 10 minutes of jogging followed by functional movements for all body parts, such as marching on the spot, calf raises and arm swings. Cool down with five minutes of easy jogging and some held stretches.

■ Total workout time should be 30 to 40 minutes.

■ Make it tougher! Increase the work time and decrease the rest time.

■ Who's this workout for? Anyone really. The combination of core and leg exercises and its dynamic nature makes it great for runners, triathletes and cyclists looking for increased leg power and a strong core. It's also a great option for anyone planning to race an obstacle course this summer.



1 BURPEES

How to: Get down into the burpee position. Bend your knees, placing your hands directly below your shoulders. Push down into the floor with your arms to activate your lower abdomen. Then drive your legs backwards, almost to full extension. Bring your legs back and get your feet close to your shoulders, lift your hands from the floor and extend your legs and body to leap into the air. Land lightly, bend your knees, and return to the burpee position. Repeat.

Why: *"Burpees are a great all-body workout, and a challenging cardiovascular exercise. They work your chest, arms, front deltoids, thighs, hamstrings and abdominals," says Smith.*

Do: **30sec on/20sec rest**

2 FRONT PLANK

How to: Start with your elbows directly beneath your shoulders, and set your legs back so that your feet are in line with your hips. Look straight down at your hands. Lengthen your spine and squeeze your lower abdominals. Make sure your head is still, your back doesn't dip, and that there's no pressure in your lower back.

Why: *"This exercise requires good strength and stability in your ankles, hips and shoulder girdle. Plus it activates the deeper abdominal muscles. It will help you maintain a neutral spine position and a correct joint alignment as well as reducing back injury and strain," says Smith.*

Do: **30sec on/20sec rest**

3 BEAR CRAWL

How to: Start in a static press-up position. Now crawl forwards, moving your left arm with your right leg, and your right arm with your left leg. Continue forwards.
Why: *"This exercise builds strength and stability through the glutes, shoulders, wrists, hips, ankles and core muscles," says Smith.*
Do: **Crawl 10m x 4, take 20sec between crawls**

4 BACK EXTENSIONS

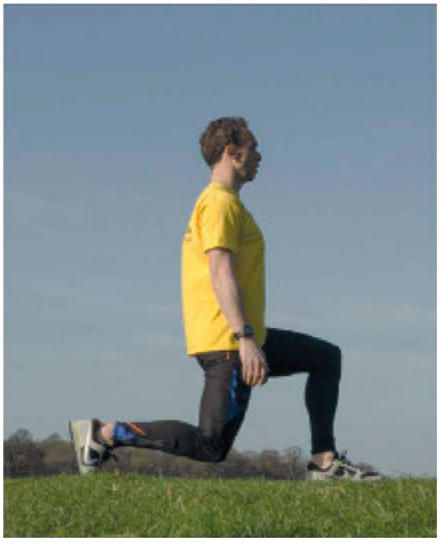
How to: Lie down with your chest on the ground and your eyes looking down. While tucking your chin in, lengthen your spine and try to pull your belly button off the ground. Keep your arms by your sides. You'll find your torso lifts off the ground.

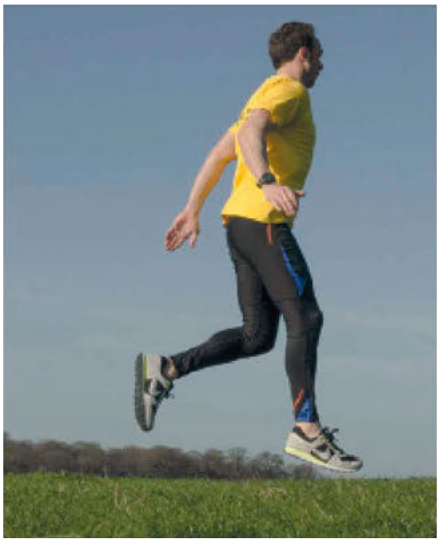
Why: *"This exercise strengthens the back muscles that run down the spine from the neck to the base of the spine," says Smith.*
Do: **30sec on/20sec rest**

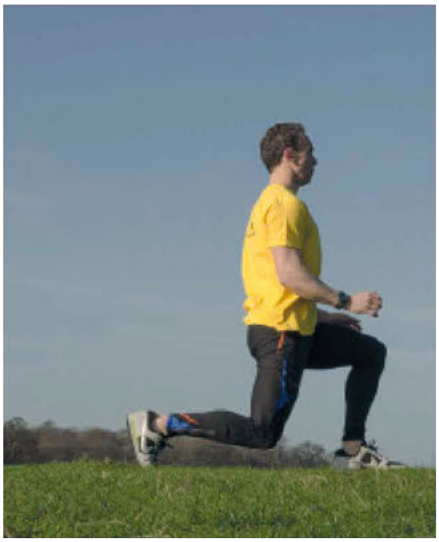
5 JUMP LUNGES

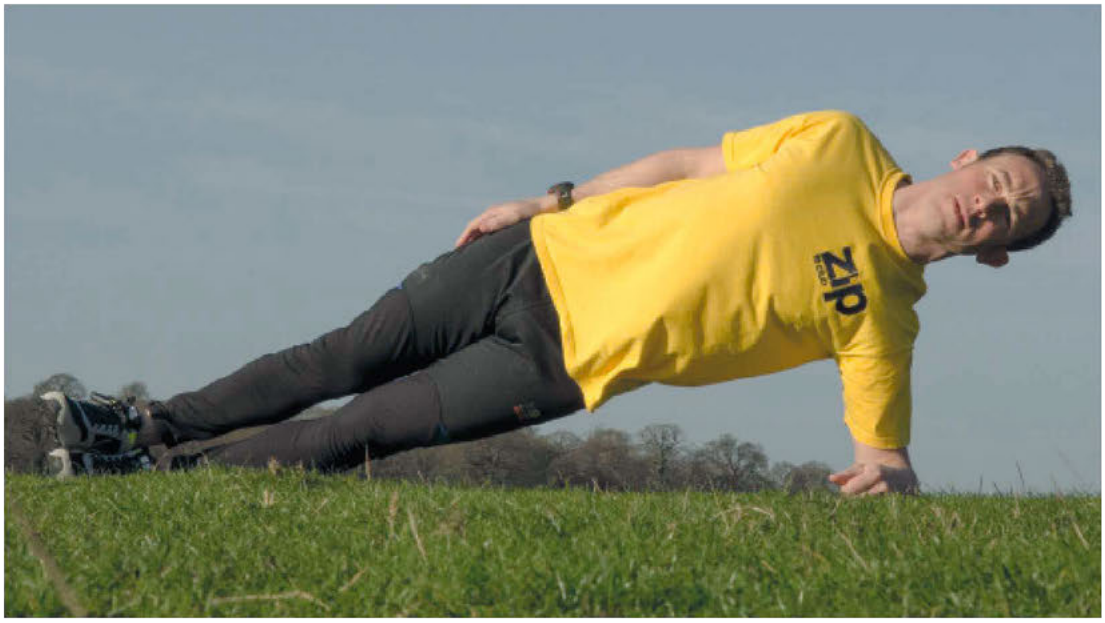
How to: Start in a lunge position. Jump into the air and scissor your legs just as you leave the ground, so that when you drop back down your opposite leg is now to the front. Land lightly and explode into another jump. Use your arms for balance and to add power.

Why: *"This exercise is great for developing your quads, your hamstrings and your glutes," says Smith.*
Do: **30sec on/20sec rest**







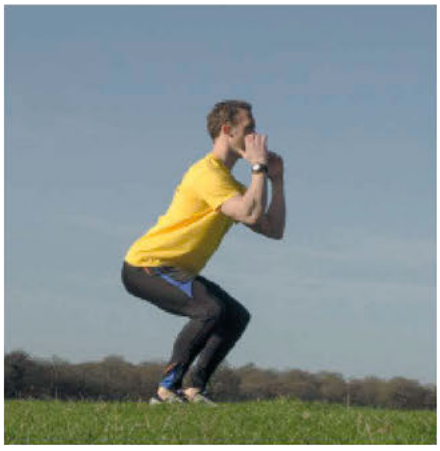


6 SIDE PLANK

How to: Start with your elbow directly below your shoulder. Place one foot on top of the other and align your ankles, hips and shoulder joints. As you lift your hips off the floor, broaden your chest, and lengthen your spine. Make sure your nose is pointing down the middle of your chest.

Why: *"This exercise strengthens your internal and external obliques – the muscles that support your spine from the sides. It's a great core exercise to strengthen your spinal cord," says Smith.*

Do: 30sec on/20sec rest



7 BUNNY JUMPS & RUN BACK

How to: Do three consecutive bunny jumps forwards and immediately do a short backwards run.

Why: *"This combo is a great cardiovascular exercise and specifically targets your glutes, quads and calf muscles. The change of direction requires a lot of energy and dynamic movement. On the backwards runs you'll be loading your ankle, shin, quads and hamstring muscles differently and thereby strengthening them in an oft-neglected way compared to much the more typical forwards movements," says Smith.*

Do: 3 bunny jumps and 1 run backwards x 3, take 20sec between efforts

8 LATERAL LUNGES

How to: From a standing position, step out to the side into a lateral lunge. Push your bottom backwards as you do so, keeping your upper body in an upright position. Keep your knee behind your toes as you lunge and push back dynamically through your heel. Alternate sides.

Why: *"This exercise strengthens your glutes and both the inside and outside of your thighs (adductor and abductor muscles). It'll help to develop leg stability and will improve your ability to direct power where you need it when running i.e. push you forwards, by counteracting wasted lateral movement," says Smith.*

Do: 30sec on/20sec rest

■ **Thanks to PT Christopher Smith (pictured) from Zip Fit Club, which offers 30-minute lunchtime workouts to Londoners, zipfitclub.co.uk**

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Words Maxwell Roche **Pictures** Grant Pritchard

Up the Creek with a Paddle

Kayaking is a valuable skill for any would-be adventure type and it's also great fun to mess about in a boat. Maxwell Roche grabs a paddle and heads to the Lee Valley White Water Centre for some thrills and spills.

The calm before the storm

HANDS ON THE side of the kayak I push. Deep breath, I push again. Nothing. I'm stuck.

I'm racking my brains trying to think back five minutes when I'd nodded and smiled confidently whilst being run through the capsize drill. So I try again. Hands on the side of the kayak, push. Still stuck. Ermm... In the dark, turbulent and disorientating darkness I'm quickly running out of breath. I plummet upside-down over the next rapid and something unknown thumps me in the teeth (probably my recently abandoned paddle), I can feel the icy fingers of panic stretching out to take their grasp. Oh God, think man!

Hands on the side of the kayak, push... no wait, lean forward, grab the spray deck release handle, pull and now push. I'm free. The world flips on its axis and I break the surface into the sweet spring air, gulping it down and spluttering in my euphoria and relief and squinting like a newborn calf at the blinding sun.

So how at 10am on a Saturday morning did I come to be the wrong way up in a tempestuous river in a kayak, when I should've been slumbering slack-eyed beneath the safety of my duck feather duvet? Well, weeks earlier when I pitched my idea of a "river adventure" story to editor John Shepherd, my proposal was entirely different..... In my head the adventure was more a Ray Mears-esque Canadian canoe trip, gliding carefree down a serene waterway, spending balmy summer nights by a campfire with nothing for company except cold beer and blissful solitude. Somehow though I managed to let him talk me into an activity that takes place, although on water, light-years away from my romanticised imaginings. He suggested I try my hand at white water kayaking. It was something I'd never tried, yet something that I'd always wanted to have a go at, so I agreed, and where better to try it than the Lee Valley White Water Centre in Waltham Cross, North London. And before you ask, the answer is "yes", you can find world-class grade 3 and 4 rapids in North London; so there's really no need to book tickets to North Alaska, for the time being at least.

OFF I GO....

The £31,000,000 facility at Lee Valley, built to host the 2012 Olympic white-water canoe slalom events, is truly something to behold. The purpose built rivers, 300 metres and 130 metres in length are fed by a system of five monstrous pumps, which lift naturally occurring water five and a half metres above ground-level into two starting pools. Once in these pools the water is then forced at a rate of 13 cubic metres per second down the course, giving birth to the rapids. For some perspective, each cubic metre of water weighs one-tonne so that's 13 tonnes of H2O moving over the startline at any given second. A scary prospect for most of you I'm sure, but for me - a keen surfer of 15 years well used to stormy and consequential waters - no more worrying than a Tuesday night bubble bath. How wrong could I be?

> "If you're not getting wetter, you're not getting better," heckled Jess my instructor

"If you're not getting wetter, you're not getting better," heckled Jess my Level 2 instructor as I snatched at the safety line for the second time in as many minutes and was hauled humiliatingly ashore.

"Which way were you looking?"

"I'm not sure,".

"Always look where you want to go, always keep paddling and never lean up stream!"

Unexpectedly, my first day on the rapids had been spent paddling up rather than down the river. We were practising a technique called ferry gliding where the idea is to paddle upstream towards the rapids pointed at 11 o'clock, letting the angle of your kayak carry you slowly across the river from right to left. Once close to the rapid we were required to turn the kayak back downstream and "break in" to the current, letting it carry us back down the river. Sounds simple, doesn't it? But all the time the angry water wants to tip you over. If like me on my first few attempts, you're tense and twitchy, the likelihood is you'll be caught unawares by a slight increase in flow speed or direction and flip.

"It's all in the hips", says Jess with a wink as I surface gasping like a freshly netted trout for the third time that morning, I must remember

that.

When you arrive at Lee Valley - which is just a half hour tube ride from central London for the start of your course, the cheery staff will sign you in and direct you to the kit room where you'll be given a nice thick wetsuit and buoyancy aid. Once you've donned this gear in the squeaky clean and modern changing rooms, you'll head out into the courtyard where your instructor will size you up with a glance, and fit you with a boat, paddle and spray deck, to keep the water out. In a matter of minutes you'll find yourself, together with a small group of equally apprehensive individuals, fully furnished with all the necessaries and out onto the invitingly turquoise, slightly chlorinated, waters of the lake, ready for business.

WEEK 4

It's week 4 of my Level 2 course and I'm decidedly more confident. Now I find myself able to slide off the bank much further up river, break into the fast flowing current, control the boat's speed and course, smash through the larger rapids and break out of the current into the safety of the calm areas of water called Eddies (not a guy called Eddie!). I'm more relaxed, having come to terms with the not so life threatening consequences of a capsize and most important of all I'm learning to use my legs, hips and torso to generate speed through the water and turn with balance and control. Despite my preconceptions, kayaking is far from just an upper body workout. Apparently when proper form is used, your core muscles are those primarily responsible for the stability and propulsion of the kayak and it's actually your abdominals, hips and back that are most active, not your arms. I was also surprised to learn that as the legs provide the connection with the kayak and the water they are also quite heavily involved. As you become more experienced and learn proper technique, the intricacies of how the legs, in conjunction with the hips, help to turn, stabilise, brace and roll the kayak become more evident.

Jess: "You're so much better today Max, what's happened?" She shouted this out as I swung the boat deftly and daintily alongside the bank; a figure of new-found poise and proficiency against the boiling waters. "Did you change kayak, have you been practising in secret?" I smiled wryly up at her. "I'm not hung over!" I said this with a shrug and a grin (Friday night drinking had been curtailed before this Saturday – note, seriously, it's best to arrive with a clear-head before charging down the rapids!). She laughed and I stroked back into the flow letting the current carry me away downstream.

TESTING TIMES

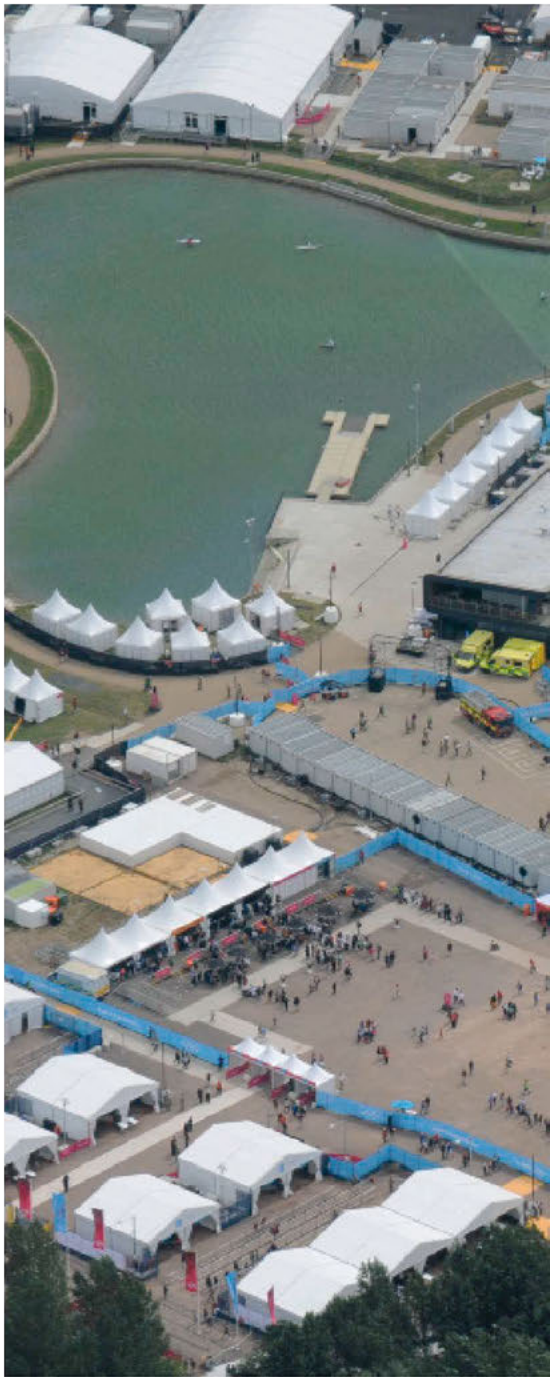
In order to be deemed capable of taking on the 300 metre grade 3/4 Olympic course at Lee Valley any would-be kayaker must first enrol on and complete a series of qualification courses. Each course costs £90 and consists of six sessions of one-hour, each week either in the evening or on the weekend. The courses range from levels 1-5. Level 1 is designed for first-timers and is taught on the lake. You don't need any prior experience to enrol. Level 2, which I completed, serves purely as an introduction into the white water world, and takes place at the bottom of the smaller 130m Legacy course. Levels 3 and 4 will see you a little higher up the Legacy course in the grade 2/3 rapids, with Level 4 seeing you fully qualified to book into public paddling sessions on the Legacy course. Finally Level 5 is about progressing onto the grade 3/4 rapids Olympic course. This is where you'll prepare for an assessment, which on passing will give you an "Olympic" membership, and means you can book onto public paddling sessions on the Olympic course. As Lee Valley is home to the British kayaking team you'll likely be surrounded by world-class athletes during these sessions and given the congenial nature of all who participate, integrated quickly into the community.

At first Maxwell spent more time in the water than on it.

Despite my initial fear and instability after six sessions I'm finally getting the hang of it and being rewarded significantly for my efforts. The feeling of being swept along aboard 13 tonnes of H2O; cool spray across your face, paddling deftly, then powerfully where necessary, smashing through the frothing waves and hand-brake turning out of the flow into the darker swirling pools of calmer water is like no other. I can only imagine the satisfaction and physical rewards that must be gained from learning to skilfully negotiate the Olympic slalom course. You'd need to pirouette beneath the gates, whilst using every sinew to slide and glide balletically from bank to bank before plummeting over waterfalls and into the standing waves. After a Level 2 course, like the one I did, you're sort of peeping your head out of maybe the second story window, but once you've got your Olympic membership it must be like standing on the roof of a skyscraper!

So what does all this boil down to? Well, if you're looking for a challenge, something both exhilarating and invigorating, that will sprinkle a pinch of spice onto any evening or weekend, and wake you every session like an air horn to the ear hole, call off the search! White water kayaking at a facility like Lee Valley is not only great for your core strength and fitness it's also relatively cheap to learn, not weather-dependant and easily accessible. Provided you progress accordingly, in as little as 30 hours you can become a fully qualified British Canoe Union 4 kayaker, run the Olympic rapids and hone the skills that will take you safely from the confines of the centre and into the natural environment. I'm planning my real-world adventure right now. Have paddle, will travel.

■ With thanks to the Lee Valley White Water Centre, visitleevalley.org.uk



"Now pay attention Maxwell", says my excellent instructor Jess.

The £31,000,000 facility at Lee Valley, built to host the 2012 Olympic white-water canoe slalom events, is truly something to behold.

Author Maxwell Roche

FASTER, FASTER, FASTER...

Bored of road or trail riding? Then maybe it's time to consider downhill mountain biking. Andrew Hamilton explores what the thrill of the descent has to offer and talks to an up and coming downhill racer.

SOMEWHAT OBVIOUSLY AS its name suggests downhill mountain biking is a form of cycling where the goal is to descend a hill – fast! However, unlike road cycling in hilly terrain or even riding hilly trails, downhill mountain biking involves riding down short and steep point-to-point courses, which are designed to test riders by incorporating a number of technical features such as rocks, tree roots, jumps and drop offs. For those unfamiliar to downhill, these technical features may at first appear so hazardous as to be completely incapable of being ridden. To a seasoned downhiller however, it's features like jumps and drop-offs (the latter's riding off a rock to land several feet below), that produce the biggest thrills.

DOWNHILL DIFFERENCES

Downhill mountain biking is very distinct from other forms of cycling - especially road cycling. For starters, you ride downhill only because you're timed from top to bottom and even if you wanted to, it's often impossible to ride the bike back up the way you came down! Another major difference is that whereas trail and (particularly) road riding tends to favour light and slender athletes with very high levels of aerobic capacity (because of the need to ride uphill as well as down!), the best downhill riders need to have a lot more explosive power and strength to withstand the punishing forces and negotiate the hazards while descending. A third main difference lies in the level of technical ability required. Almost anyone can ride a bike on the road and while there are certain technical skills required for road racing (e.g. riding close in the pack), these are nothing compared to the skills required when riding as fast as you can while descending a rocky/muddy mountainside littered with trees and root systems! Finally of course, the type of bike used and kit required for downhill mountain biking is very different – especially when compared with road cycling (of which more later).

WANT TO HAVE A GO?

OK, suppose you're an accomplished road cyclist looking for a new challenge. What's the best way to dip your toe into downhill biking? A good idea is to try your hand at some off-road mountain biking first to get a feel for riding on an irregular surface. Starting with relatively smooth trails and bridleways, you can gradually introduce progressively more hilly and challenging terrain as your confidence and technical ability (e.g. braking, cornering, hopping over roots etc) improves. With enough practise, you'll eventually feel confident of tackling some of the gentler downhill courses. If you're already an experienced off-road/trail rider, the progression is the same but you'll obviously start with a big advantage over your road-only cousins!

THE BASICS OF DOWNHILL RACING

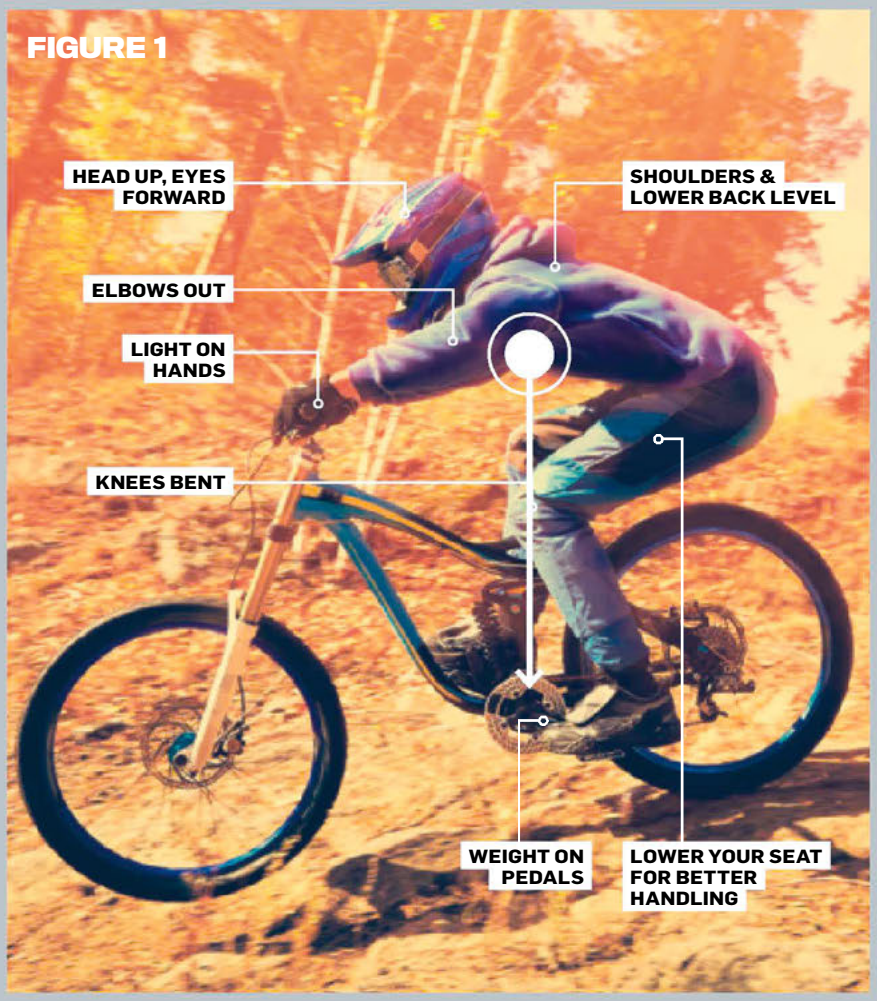
Downhill races start with practise runs. This is a chance for riders to learn the course and set-up their bikes (especially suspension) for the particular demands of the terrain and the conditions. Practise is generally followed by a timed run, which is often used to seed riders for the final, with the fastest rider from the timed run going last, which always builds tension and excitement as leaders are deposed one-by-one from the "hot seat".

Downhill courses vary in descent and technical severity. Riders normally compete in a series of races so the overall winner has to be a good all rounder. Courses are usually marked out and taped off only just before the racing itself begins. This aids riders who aren't local and who have therefore had no prior course contact.

Words Andrew Hamilton **Pictures** Shutterstock & Andrew Hamilton

GETTING BETTER

Once you've got a reasonable feel for riding off road and feel more confident tackling hillier terrain, you can begin to think about developing specific riding skills and fitness. In terms of specific skills, there are a number of areas you need to focus on including:

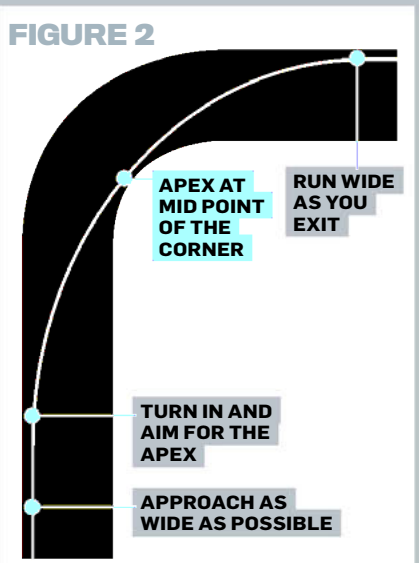


DEVELOPING THE ATTACK POSITION A basic standing riding position, and the first riding technique any aspiring off-road cyclist (downhill or trail) needs to learn. The attack position is achieved by standing on the pedals while they are held at the 3 and 9 o'clock positions (see Figure 1). This allows you to easily move your body position on in relation to the bike – essential for cornering when the trail gets tight and twisty and for negotiating difficult obstacles.

BRAKING The key to good braking is looking ahead and being able to spot a hazard well in advance. This gives you enough time to brake progressively and slow down gently in a straight line. By contrast, grabbing at the brakes during panic braking is a recipe for loss of control of the bike, and all too often a crash. It helps to keep the brake levers covered with at least one finger at all times, as this will allow instant smooth braking and the other fingers to maintain control of the handlebars. You'll also need to master how to brace your body to balance braking forces; the different responses to front and rear braking; and how surfaces affect braking requirements.

STEEP DESCENTS When descending steeper slopes, you need to adapt the attack position by moving your body backwards and downward – failure to do so could allow the rear wheel to lift, sending you over the bars. Keep your weight centred over the cranks by extending your arms and pushing the bike into the descent in one smooth motion. Take care not to go too far back though as this will take too much loading off the front wheel, with poor steering and unpredictable braking as a result. Maintain a "loose hands" riding position, with your weight over the cranks as you continue down the slope and use your leading foot to help brace against any forward movement. When braking downhill, try not to apply your brakes the whole way down a long descent. Instead, brake firmly on smoother, less steep sections of trail and allow the bike to roll through the rougher and steep sections if possible. Remember too that for a given reduction in speed, braking will take longer when descending than it would on the flat. You'll also need to brace yourself for the extra forward shift in body weight during downhill braking and adjust your stance accordingly. Finally, when the trail ahead flattens off again, don't forget that to avoid taking a trip off the back of the bike, you'll need to readjust your riding position by bringing your weight forwards.

CORNERING Keeping up speed through a corner is a key part of success in downhill; not only does it help shave valuable seconds off, it also means that less effort and energy is needed to accelerate back up to speed on the straights. A key tip on a wider course is to take the "racing line", which helps reduce the severity of the turn and the distance around it (see Figure 2). Keep wide on the approach to give yourself a better view of the trail ahead and brake before you begin the turn, which helps keep the bike settled. After the apex, allow yourself to drift gently away from the inside edge of the trail and exit the corner towards the outer edge. Try to make the path of your turn one smooth constant turn. During the turn itself, leaning the bike into the corner will help you to turn. Do this by easing the handlebars down towards the turn apex. It also helps to align your head, shoulders and upper body in the direction of the turn, which helps you commit mentally to taking the turn.



The ideal racing line shown here assumes no obstacles in the way! You should ideally brake before the turn in for the apex than accelerate again after the apex of the corner.

Keeping up speed through a corner is a key part of success in downhill; not only does it help shave valuable seconds off, it also means that less effort and energy is needed to accelerate back up to speed on the straights.

DOWNHILL MTB RIDER PROFILE DARREN WILKIN

Darren Wilkin has been riding bikes as long as he can remember. During his teenage years, he was heavily into messing around on his BMX and especially enjoyed perfecting jumps and turns. When his grandfather bought him a downhill bike, Darren took naturally to the sport and it wasn't long before he starting riding competitively. "I actually crashed badly in my first ever race," explained Darren. "Fortunately, it didn't put me off - I stuck with it and over the last three to four years, I've made good progress. I guess it helps living high in the Cumbrian Pennines – we have lots of hills to practise on around here and with the help of a local landowner, we're even constructing our own downhill course."

Now 24, Darren is riding as a "senior category" rider in downhill and in the early stages of last season was placed third in the English national rankings. However, a nasty crash in September during the British Downhill Series race at Merthyr Tydfil ended his season. After landing on his bike saddle, Darren was rushed to hospital with a perforated bowel. "Had it not been for the quick-thinking paramedic who was first on the scene, I might not be here now. It took weeks before I was even allowed near a bike so that was the end of my season," sighed Darren.

In terms of training, Darren is a great believer in resistance training for strength, and sprint interval training on the ergo for power. For skills training however, he recommends riding downhill and lots of it! "I don't think you can improve your bike handling skills unless you're on the bike. Of course, that means starting out riding relatively easy and non-technical terrain and gradually progressing from there. You can't just ride down the first mountainside you see," he laughed.

I asked Darren what he loves most about downhill? "It's just the best sport there is," he said, "When you can combine lots of speed with the mastery of negotiating technical obstacles, it's a huge buzz! Of course, there are inevitably crashes to deal with but these just makes me want to get back on and ride faster!

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

The fitness demands for downhill mountain biking are similar to other forms of cycling but there are some important differences. For starters, while a good level of aerobic fitness is desirable, it's not as fundamental as in road and trail cycling. That's because the average speeds attained down a course are determined much more by the technical skill and rider power and gravity, and less by cardiovascular and muscular endurance. However, a decent level of endurance is still desirable as you'll need to repeatedly ride or push your bike back up to the top of the course and you'll want to be able to start each downhill run feeling as fresh as possible.

Another difference is that downhill riders need high levels of explosive power and upper body strength (especially grip strength) in order to accelerate and manoeuvre the bike around/over obstacles. It's for this reason that resistance training often features heavily as an essential component of an elite downhill rider's training schedule – particularly chest, back, shoulder and forearm (gripping) exercises. However, important as strength training is, there's no substitute for getting onto a downhill trail and practising the manoeuvres required.

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

Like all mountain bikes, fat knobbly tyres form the foundation of a downhill bike's off-road ability. X-country/trail bikes will often have front or dual suspension and strong brakes as they're designed to be light, with a wide range of gears in order to help make ascending as easy as possible, however, downhill bikes are much more robustly built; with longer travel and highly adjustable suspension, tougher wheels and tyres, and a frame geometry more suited to descending. Having said that, a X-country bike with compliant suspension provides a good starting point for a beginner starting out in downhill.

In addition to the bike, some items of safety equipment are essential. First and foremost is a full-face helmet - not just to protect your skull, but your jaw and face too. Gloves are desirable as your hands are always in the firing line if you come off the bike. You'll also need knee pads to protect from grazing or worse, a broken kneecap should you hit something hard at speed. Well padded mountain bike shorts are very important also – if possible go for reinforced cycling shorts, which have raised plastic mouldings on the hip and side leg areas to protect your upper legs and hips from having the skin taken off in the event of a crash.

MORE INFO

- **For an overview of downhill racing and a directory of events and venues see, Britishcycling.org.uk (search "get into mountain biking")**
- **For learning more about downhill technique see, mtbtechniques.co.uk**

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Outdoor Fitness's new training diary candidates have set themselves up to enter some mega events in the near future. There's a distinctly Welsh flavour to what's afoot.

TARGET: IRONMAN WALES

Ironmen

If you take three men that between them have destroyed knees, can't swim and hate running, then add a pint of beer, what would you expect the logical outcome to be? Err, enter Ironman Wales of course! So how are the guys doing?

RICHARD MANNING 47,
Richard is a design engineer living in Llandeilo, South Wales.

Training is coming on OK, I guess! I've been struggling with a niggling calf injury that doesn't want to go away. It doesn't stop me cycling or swimming but affects my running. This means it gets put on hold for a couple of weeks every time it happens. I probably ought to be resting it far longer than I am, so that it heals fully. I've invested in some calf compression sleeves in the hope they speed up recovery and protect from injury.

My swimming is progressing. I've avoided lessons so far (relying on youtube videos!), but I'm hoping to get some tips from fellow triathletes with open water swimming. I'm swimming in Tenby with the Tenby Aces, joining Colin and Huw every Friday evening.

I suppose cycling is my strongest discipline. I'm trying to get out for at least one 100-mile ride each week, with a few shorter ones thrown in as and when. I've entered a 24-hour race (Mountain Mayhem) this month (June at time of writing) on my fat bike and the following weekend with two friends I'm riding from the top of Anglesey to Llantwit Major - roughly 350km, with over 5000m climbing. I'll make the next day a rest day.

I'm going to have a fitness test at Cycle Specific, to see where I am and to set my training zones. I'll be tested again a few weeks before Ironman Wales to hopefully see an improvement, and to review my zones, ready for the big day.

COLIN BARRETT 43,
Colin in a peripatetic brass instrument teacher for Pembrokeshire music service.

Training is going well. I have two 13-week training plans that I'm sticking to pretty well. My cycling has really come on over the last couple of months - a new bike and specific training has helped.

My swimming has also improved loads, considering I couldn't manage one length of the pool in November! I'm now feeling stronger and more comfortable with each training session. I had a bit of a set back recently though; it was my first sea swim with the Tenby Aces. Instead of going at my own pace and concentrating on my stroke, I panicked and tried to keep up. This resulted in inhaling water into my lungs and it was game over. I couldn't swim back in and had to be dragged to safety. After much coughing I was OK but really had serious doubts about everything, and it went through my mind about pulling out of Iron Man.

After feeling sorry for myself I knew I needed to get back in the sea as soon as possible to help me get over it. Luckily Huw and Hunchy (his other brother-in-law) knocked on my door with their wetsuits on. I jumped at the chance and had a really good swim. I've been out with the Aces again recently and this time went at my own pace and really enjoyed it.

And my running.... training partner and friend Richard Gardiner is an elite runner – he's

Words & Pictures Anthony Pease

represented Wales and GB many times. Richard has been a great help and my running is now coming on really well. I ran for 90 minutes recently non-stop, which considering my prior non-existent exercise background is a massive improvement.

HUW BENBOW 41,
Huw is the deputy head teacher at Cleddau Reach Cc Primary school.

My training is going well, particularly swimming. I'm only open water swimming, normally at North Beach, Tenby - avoiding the jellyfish has been a challenge! Nausea was also a problem up until now, but this seems to have passed and I'm feeling good. I'm banging out a mile in around 30 minutes.

Cycling-wise I'm riding twice mid-week, and doing a long ride on Saturdays. I've had issues with the backs of my knees on the longer rides but changing my cleats seems to have sorted that.

Running is going steadily; I just need to resist the temptation to push the pace too much as I need to run longer and therefore slower. I'm feeling comfortable up to 10 miles and need to push through that now.

I'm also working hard to sort my nutrition out and this includes maximising my electrolyte intake to try to reduce some of the cramps I've been experiencing during brick training.

The kit needed for Neil's Fan Dance & Fan 24 encounter

TARGET: BRECON ULTRA

Before the Brecon Ultra, Neil has a date with the Fan Dance.

NEIL SPENCER, 34 lives in Newport and is a former soldier.

As you'll be aware I'm in training for the tough Might Contain Nuts' Brecon ultra (winter edition) this December. Its 46 miles of mixed mountain and trail running, but before I do this I have the Cardiff half marathon in Oct and on 6th June the Fan Dance and a challenge I've named myself the "Fan 24".

The Fan Dance is a tough and now famous route over two sides of Pen y Fan (the highest mountain in the Brecon Beacons and southern Britain). I'll be doing this carrying a 35lbs pack. Straight after the Fan Dance I move onto the more personal task of walking up and down the Fan non-stop for 24 hours – the Fan 24.

The distance and altitude climbed will be similar to completing the National 3 Peaks challenge twice within 30 hours, so this is no walk in the park and no simple training task.

Over the last few months my training has consisted of many weekly sessions on a treadmill carrying a 35lbs weighted rucksack on an incline. Having already spent 16 hours on a treadmill non-stop in a previous challenge, long training sessions are not too much of a drama. My longest session recently has been three hours and I covered a distance of around 11 miles on a hill setting.

I tend to do cardio four to five days a week. My body is getting used to the regular training , but I do sometimes find my one knees aches a little due to a little cartridge wear, so I use a knee support and ice afterwards. This allows me to continue and of course I do plenty of stretching before and after my workouts.

On top of the cardio I've also been hitting the weights to build up some strength and endurance. Carrying a weighted pack for long periods will require a good solid frame i.e. your legs, shoulders, back and core must be conditioned to cope. I'm using three sets of

around 20 reps at about 60% of my one rep max.

I was hoping for a final training session on Pen y Fan before the event, but due to work commitments I struggled for time, so instead I used a smaller 400m mountain just a few miles from my home.

As for the mental side of preparation, having already completed a few tough events, I'm well aware of my limits, I therefore feel there is little more I can prepare for mentality. All that is left is to take as much kit as required. I'm taking a 24-hour military ration pack containing around 5000 calories, plus some chocolate and fruit and some 16 litres of water – you can see all my gear in the attached pic.

When you read my next entry the Fan Dance and Fan 24 will all be over - hopefully with a successful outcome. But I won't rest on my laurels as I will be aiming for the Cardiff half next.

Neil is raising funds for: Talking2minds and the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, you can donate at, virginmoneygiving.com/NeilSpencerfandance

Ask the experts

From how to deal with swim induced ear infections, to Achilles tendon strains to, carb gel alternates, our experts have the answers. Email your query to of.ed@kelsey.co.uk

ANDY HAMILTON
SPORTS PERFORMANCE AND NUTRITION EXPERT, ANDREWMARKHAMILTON.CO.UK

Q: I'm a keen swimmer and have recently begun to train in open water, with a view to competing in some open-water events later this year. However, over the last couple of months, I've been suffering with bouts of really bad earache. I've been to the doctor and he says the pain is due to a condition called "swimmer's ear". My ears are OK at the moment, but how can I prevent it from coming back? Is there anything I can wear in my ears while swimming to prevent water ingress?
Lorna Stevens, by email

A: Swimmer's ear (more correctly known as "otitis externa") is caused by an inflammation of the outer ear canal - the tube between the skin's surface of the external ear and the eardrum – and is usually caused by an infection, which may be bacterial or fungal. Typical symptoms include redness and swelling of the skin of the ear canal and itchiness, especially in the early stages. As it progresses, the ear can become extremely sore and painful, and as the canal becomes more inflamed, hearing may also be affected.

Anyone can develop otitis externa and it often follows localised trauma to the skin of the ear canal, for example, if the canal is scraped by a cotton-tipped bud in an attempt to remove earwax (which you should not do - wax works its way out naturally, and cotton buds should only be used to sweep around your outer ear) or scratching the ear with fingernails in an attempt to relieve an itch. However, constantly getting the ears wet can also damage the normal immune defences in the ear leading to infection (hence the term swimmer's ear). This risk is further increased if the water contains significant levels of bacteria.

Unfortunately, once you've suffered one episode of otitis externa, you're more likely to suffer a subsequent one, which means extra care is required. To help prevent future episodes, wear a tight-fitting cap that completely covers your ears whenever you swim and plug the ears , where possible, with cotton wool coated in Vaseline. After swimming, dry any water in your ears using a hairdryer on a low setting and follow up with an acidifying ear spray product (such as "Earcalm"), which temporarily enhances the ear canal's natural acidity, inhibiting any bacterial growth.

Pictures Shutterstock

EMMA BARACLOUGH

SENIOR SPORTS NUTRITIONIST FOR SCIENCE IN SPORT (SIS), SCIENCEINSPORT.COM

Q: I'm not one for carb gels, what alternatives are there for a quick and lasting carb boost whilst out on the run?
Alison Jarvis, by email

A: If you don't like energy gels, energy bars are probably your next most convenient option. You need to make sure that your body can cope with solid food on the run; as when you put food into your stomach blood is diverted to the gut to aid digestion. If you are running at a high intensity, this can lead to stomach cramps and an uncomfortable run, and it's one of the main reasons why gels are so popular amongst runners. For ultra running though, you are likely to be going at a slower pace so may tolerate solid foods better, and you'll of course need fluid, so a drink containing carbohydrates is also an option.

Foods such as Jelly babies, bananas and flapjacks are popular food choices, but these aren't without their pitfalls. Sweets and chews are formulated on simple sugars, which require more water to be consumed with them to help them absorb properly. You also run a greater risk of having stomach problems, caused by the delayed gastric emptying of the simple sugars and by feeding the bacteria in the gut, leading to gas and bloating. You'd also have to eat quite a lot, to hit the required target of 60g of carbohydrate per hour. Foods such as flapjacks can also be problematic as they contain quite high levels of fat and some fibre, all of which slows down their digestion rate and can leave them sitting heavily in your stomach. Another favorite are bananas, however, they're mainly fructose, which is a low GI sugar, whereas a high GI carbohydrate is preferable during exercise due to its fast release of energy.

If you really don't like the gels you have tried, keep experimenting, as they really are the most convenient and easy on your stomach option. Gels can vary hugely in carbohydrate source, content and concentration, with some also containing electrolytes and caffeine – all of which can give you a concentrated and balanced energy-sustaining hit.

PHIL NOURSE

S&C EXPERT, TOTALCONDITIONING.CO.UK

Q: I'd like to improve my bike sprinting ability. I know that our top cyclists do a lot of weight training. What exercises can I benefit from?
Joe Williams, by email

A: Absolutely they do! Chris Hoy, for example, had a reported best squat of 237.5kg, which was over two and a half times his bodyweight! He could also power clean over one and a half times bodyweight with a PB of 150kg. In fact these are probably the two key exercises needed to develop strength and power in your legs for increased sprinting ability.

The squat in its various forms is perhaps the best exercise to develop pure strength in the legs and the power clean is one of the top exercises to convert that pure strength into explosive power. That said, cycling is a unilateral sport, i.e. the legs work independently rather than together, and evidence seems to suggest that in such sports it's beneficial to perform single leg strength exercises. Thus you may also wish to explore variations of the single leg squat and leg press and lunge. Key is also the weight you lift and – once conditioned to these exercises – a medium to heavy weight should be used with low rep numbers (4-6). You should also take plenty of recovery between sets. You should also aim to drive the weights up fast, whilst controlling and working the lowering phase. You could try lifting and lowering the weight to a one up and two down count.

And yes, I know they are indoor exercises, but you won't mind a bit of indoor training if your outdoor sprinting improves, now will you?

MARK WOOD

BRITISH MILITARY FITNESS, BRITMILFIT.COM

Q: I've injured my Achilles tendon, tendinopathy I've been told, what exercises if any can I do to re-build strength and promote healing?
Steven Logan, by email

A: Tendinopathy describes two conditions that are likely to occur together: tendon inflammation, known as tendonitis, and tiny tears in the connective tissue in or around the tendon, known as tendinosis. To promote healing it's important to take action straight away. Some of the following steps will help with the healing process:

- Rest the painful area.
- Apply ice for 20 minutes at a time, as often as two times per hour for the first 72 hours
- Do gentle range of movement exercises to help prevent stiffness.

Once the healing process is well underway and the pain and swelling reduced it's important to get a good range of movement back in the tendon-joint complex. Massage and stretching routines will help increase the tendon's range of movement.

Once range of movement is back to near full level, it's then important to begin a strength programme. Some of the best types of exercise are those that involve an eccentric muscular action. Eccentric training means putting the muscle under tension as it's lengthening. For example, when performing a calf/heel raise you would concentrate on and slow down the lowering eccentric phase – perhaps to a ten-second count. Once this and similar exercises can be completed you should then move onto more concentric and faster movements (where the muscles shorten) and potentially start focusing on other muscles in the leg such at the glutes, to boost strength and stability (often an injury can be related to a lack of strength or stability elsewhere). The final stage would be to return to more high speed exercises i.e. progressing from jogging, to mid-pace and then faster running.

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Celebrate performance

You may have smashed your Olympic tri PB or astounded yourself with your time trial performance. So you reason a few beers are in order, well of course you can celebrate, but you also need to get some other refreshment inside you too, if you want to maximise your recovery.

THE BEST COMBINATION of macronutrients post race/workout is one that combines both protein and carbs. The ratio is generally recommended to be 1:4 respectively and you should start this recovery process immediately post PB/workout.

If you don't replenish the carbs you've expended, you run the risk of reducing glycogen restocking and extending your recovery by a couple of days (glycogen is premium grade muscle fuel and can only be stored in the body in limited amounts).

You also need protein to repair the muscle breakdown that'll have occurred during a workout/race and re-build the damaged tissue. Protein used as energy will also need to be replaced – although more unusual this can be a consequence of for example, ultra races.

Hydration is also crucial; you'll have lost a lot of liquid. It's usual for people to finish marathons dehydrated for example.

And so to the pub. A pint contains around 215 calories - of which circa 15 are carbs , 2 protein and 17.5 alcohol. It does contain anti-oxidants (from hops), flavanoids and B-vitamins (the later from malted barley) and the electrolyte potassium, for example. All are ingredients that can help with recovery, together with the calorific content. However, the problem is the alcohol in your pint tends to work against the "good" the other ingredients could do (alcohol contains 7.5 calories per gram and has no nutritional value). Now, we could be sounding like we're bringing back temperance but we're only pointing out that good recovery is what you need to do to maximise your outdoor fitness lifestyle. So make sure you get the best recovery post PB/workout you can, and a few jars, as long as perhaps, you don't break a PB everyday won't hurt!

Words Andrew Hamilton Pictures Shutterstock

Watermelon Man?

Although the use of amino acids in sports nutrition is quite commonplace, you're probably not familiar with L-citrulline. But as Andrew Hamilton explains, some recent research suggests that this little known nutrient may have real potential to enhance your sport performance.

THINK OF PERFORMANCE-boosting foods and watermelon is unlikely to be top of your list. However, watermelon is rich in an amino acid called L-citrulline (referred to from here on simply as citrulline). The name citrulline is derived from citrullus, which is actually the Latin word for watermelon. Although we normally think of amino acids as the building blocks of protein, citrulline is not used to build structural proteins in the body. It's also a non-essential amino acid, which means that when conditions are right, your body can make it from other compounds. However, just because it's non-essential and uninvolved in muscle building doesn't mean that citrulline is unimportant.

CITRULLINE IN THE BODY When it comes to the potential to enhance sport performance, citrulline plays two key roles in the body. One of these is to help the body excrete a toxic by-product of metabolism called ammonia. This is important because any accumulation of ammonia in exercising muscles can impair exercise performance(1).

Another way that citrulline could help enhance performance is because it can be converted in the body to another amino acid called arginine. Why is this important? Well, scientists now know that arginine can readily be used in the body to make a key signalling molecule called nitric oxide, which has the ability to increase blood flow through muscles, providing potential benefits during exercise. Indeed the use of nitrate supplements such as beetroot juice to enhance exercise performance works by using this exact same principle(2-6).

PERFORMANCE EVIDENCE FOR CITRULLINE Sports scientists first became interested in citrulline when they noticed that consuming citrulline could raise nitric oxide levels in the body. Sports supplements claiming to boost performance by raising levels of nitric oxide are nothing new, but many such products have been shown to be ineffective both at raising nitric oxide levels or boosting performance(8,9) – most likely due to the fact they focussed on arginine as the key ingredient (see box below). The current weight of evidence in favour of citrulline use however is a good deal stronger.

Although there had previously been quite a few animal studies into citrulline, one of the earliest positive studies into citrulline supplementation to enhance performance in humans looked at the effects of a single dose of citrulline before high-intensity resistance exercise(10). The study used a randomised, double-blind, crossover design (the most rigorous kind) with a relatively large number of subjects, making its results significant. When the subjects took an 8g dose of citrulline malate beforehand, they were able to perform more sets and more reps (53% more than when they took a placebo). Another benefit was that during the 48 hours following the resistance exercise, the subjects reported a significant decrease in muscle soreness of up to 40%.

Another study looked at the effects of giving 6g of citrulline malate two hours before a 137km cycling stage(11). This study however did not look at performance per se, but rather if giving citrulline could aid recovery or affect other aspects of metabolism. The results showed that when the cyclists took the citrulline, they experienced a greater rise in growth hormone after the ride - a good thing since growth hormone helps stimulate post-exercise muscle recovery and growth. The citrulline also seemed to enhance the cyclists' muscles ability to use branched chain amino acids (BCAAs) as fuel during exercise. This is significant because we know that BCAAs are a valuable source of energy during prolonged and vigorous exercise and we also know that a greater availability of BCAAs during exercise may help to reduce muscle damage and soreness following that exercise(12).

WHY CITRULLINE, AND NOT ARGININE?

If arginine can be readily converted to nitric oxide, why not just consume extra arginine instead of citrulline? The answer is to do with the way arginine is (or actually isn't) absorbed. When you consume arginine – either in food or in supplemental form – that arginine is readily absorbed from the intestines into the bloodstream. The problem arises however when the blood passes through the liver because much of the arginine in the blood is broken down by an enzyme called arginase. This is a normal and natural process as part of the urea cycle, in which the body rids itself of protein breakdown products. However, when you're trying to boost nitric oxide production in the body, this liver barrier is something of a problem.

Taking citrulline orally however bypasses this barrier; ingested citrulline passes through the liver unaffected, meaning it can be transported in tissues all over the body and then converted to arginine (resulting in increased nitric oxide production) wherever needed. Indeed, taking citrulline is more effective at raising tissue arginine than taking arginine itself(7). It also explains why the evidence for citrulline supplementation is far more convincing in terms of boosting nitric oxide than many of the so-called nitric oxide boosting sports supplements, which have tended to be based on arginine products.

Sports scientists first became interested in citrulline when they noticed that consuming citrulline could raise nitric oxide levels in the body.

OF MICE AND MEN! When it comes to human performance, it's risky to draw firm conclusions from animal studies. Nevertheless, when combined with findings from human studies, a 2011 study on mice provides compelling evidence that citrulline really might have something going for it(13). Japanese researchers examined the effect of citrulline supplementation on the fatigue and performance of mice that swam to exhaustion while carrying a weight on their tail equivalent to 5% of their own bodyweight.

As shown to the right, the mice that had been given citrulline managed an average swimming time of 25 minutes. This compared to just 15 minutes with the mice given an inert placebo! Giving citrulline also helped to suppress the rise in exercise-induced blood lactate, which causes muscle fatigue and (eventually) forces the muscle to stop (see graphic right). The researchers were unequivocal in their conclusions commenting: "Our findings suggest that citrulline supplementation may be useful for improving the exercise performance of athletes."

THE VERY LATEST RESEARCH Coming right up to date, the evidence in favour of citrulline as an ergogenic nutrient continues to look positive. A study published in September of last year investigated the effects of citrulline supplementation on exercise performance, blood lactate, heart rate and blood pressure during lower-body resistance exercise(14). Twelve resistance-trained male subjects were randomly assigned to take either an inert placebo or 8g of citrulline prior to exercise. The resistance training consisted of five sequential sets (at a weight equivalent to 60% of 1rep maximum) performed to failure on the leg press, hack squat, and leg extension machines. The results showed that the subjects in the citrulline-supplemented group were able to perform significantly higher numbers of repetitions during all three exercises, with the researchers concluding that: "Citrulline supplementation may be beneficial in improving exercise performance during high-intensity resistance exercise."

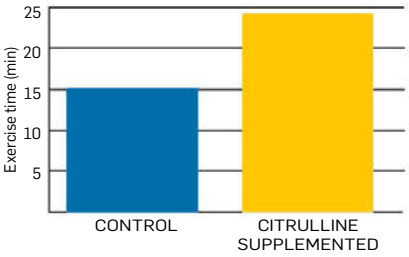
HAPPY TUMMIES Although much of the research on citrulline has concentrated on enhancing exercise performance, a recent study suggests that citrulline could help those who suffer with sensitive tummies during sport(15). Splanchnic hypoperfusion (SH) is a condition where the normal patterns of blood flow to the intestines and organs in the abdominal region are disturbed for example during vigorous exercise, when blood is directed away from the abdominal region to supply the working muscles with more blood (and oxygen). This leads to a range of gastrointestinal symptoms such as cramps and nausea, which can severely dent your performance.

The good news is that recent research suggests citrulline can help to reduce the incidence of SH in athletes. In a randomised, double-blinded crossover study (the most scientifically rigorous of the lot), 10 men cycled for 60 minutes on two separate occasions at 70% of their maximum workload (moderately hard) after taking 10g of L-citrulline or an inert placebo. During both trials, the blood flow to the gut was assessed and a technique known as "sugar probing" was used to monitor the changes in gut permeability and levels of intestinal damage.

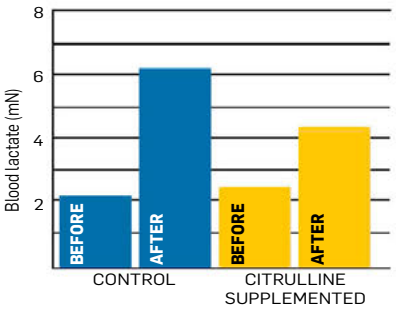
When the subjects took the citrulline, the blood flow to the gut was unaltered during exercise (i.e. SH was prevented) and there was no indication of increased damage to the intestine. When they took the placebo however, SH was observed in the subjects, which was also accompanied by increased markers of intestinal damage. How did the citrulline exert its protective effect? The most likely explanation is that when converted to arginine in the gut region, the production of nitric oxide was increased, and since nitric oxide increases blood flow in small blood vessels, this helped to offset any tendency towards SH.

SUMMARY As with any new area of research, more studies will be needed before we can fully understand how to get the best from citrulline – for example, determining the optimum dose, when it should be taken, whether it's equally effective in all individuals, and whether there are any drawbacks to citrulline supplementation. In the meantime however, recent evidence from both animal and human studies suggests that citrulline may be able to enhance high-intensity exercise performance, and may also help prevent cramps and nausea in those athletes who are prone to gut problems during exercise. If you fancy giving citrulline a try the box out right provides some practical recommendations.

SWIMMING TIMES TO EXHAUSTION



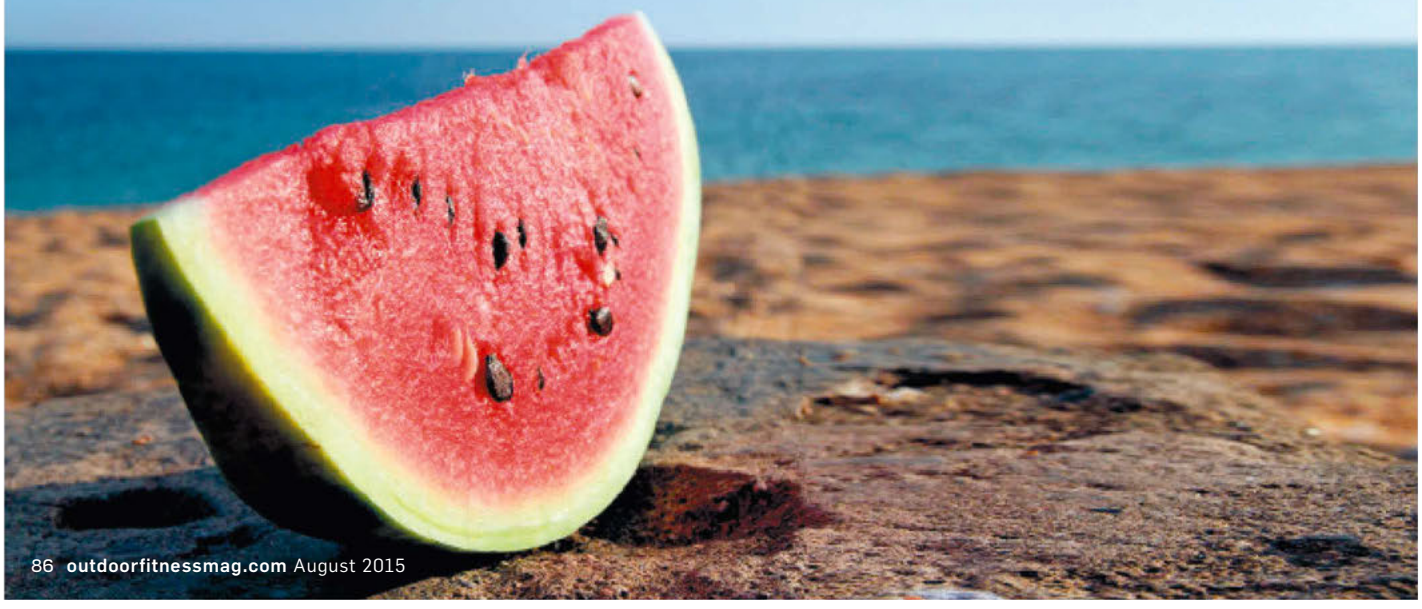
LACTATE BEFORE AND AFTER SWIMMING



Notice the much smaller lactate rise in the citrulline-supplemented mice

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- The evidence to date suggests that taking 8g of citrulline (as malate) a couple of hours or so before high-intensity exercise could enhance performance. This is probably a good starting point to experiment with.
- The evidence that citrulline can enhance performance during more moderate intensity training is weaker and therefore supplementation less recommended.
- The cheapest way to take citrulline is as a pure citrulline malate powder dissolved in water – capsules of citrulline tend to be very expensive.
- Citrulline is a generally safe supplement - however, you should NOT take citrulline if you're pregnant, breast feeding, taking any drug for erectile dysfunction such as Viagra or you use nitrate supplementation products such as beetroot juice before exercise.



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Kaniwa

In issue 40 we looked at the merits of chia, which hails from the high Andes region of South America, now Andrew Hamilton explains why another South American seed called kaniwa is definitely worthy of consideration.

LIFE FOR PLANTS growing 14,000 feet up in the high Andes of equatorial South America is tough. Bombarded daily with levels of ultra-violet radiation that would fry the average Brit in three minutes flat, crops grown here also have to contend with frequent and prolonged drought. But there's obviously something about this climate that produces nutritious grains and seeds. Many of us will be familiar with quinoa – a grain renowned for its healthy nutritional profile - and we recently saw how chia seeds from the same region provide unbelievably high levels of omega-3 fats and minerals such as zinc. Well, kaniwa is another that will spice up your diet and keep you healthy into the bargain.

Kaniwa (pronounced ka-nyi-wa) is a species of the goosefoot plant and also goes by the more technical name of Chenopodium pallidicaule. The word kaniwa sounds a bit like quinoa, and it turns out that the two species are actually closely related (quinoa's full name is Chenopodium quinoa).

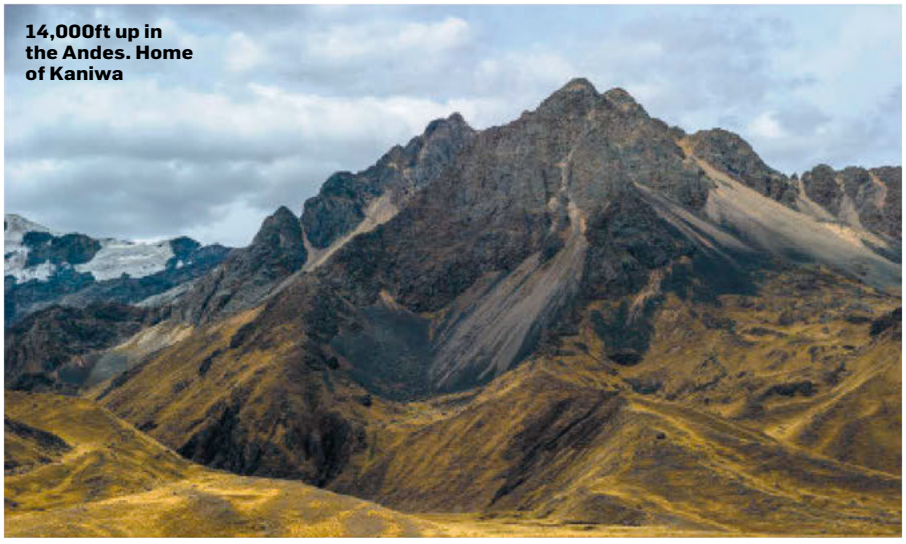
NUTRITIONAL QUALITIES Although quinoa is renowned as a healthy grain-like seed, kaniwa offers some distinct nutritional advantages over its more popular cousin. These include a higher nutrient density (on a gram-for-gram basis kaniwa provides more nutrients such as protein, antioxidants and iron than quinoa), has a quicker cooking time (thanks to a smaller seed size) and the fact (unlike quinoa) that it doesn't need to be rinsed prior to cooking because it doesn't contain any bitter-tasting saponins.

Like quinoa, kaniwa is gluten free, making it a great source of carbohydrate for those who need to follow wheat/gluten-free diets, and it also shares the slightly sweet taste of quinoa. However, when kaniwa is cooked, it retains a somewhat crunchy texture – in contrast to the fluffy nature of quinoa. In terms of its nutritional content kaniwa is a good source of protein, providing good amounts of all the essential amino acids, along with high levels of fibre, iron and calcium. Kaniwa is also a great source of phenolic antioxidants – the sort that are particularly beneficial for heart health.

COOKING WITH KANIWA Cooking kaniwa is very straightforward - simply add the kaniwa to a saucepan and add double the volume of water then simmer over low heat for 15-20 minutes. As mentioned, the absence of bitter-tasting saponins means that kaniwa does not need to be rinsed prior to cooking. For a slightly richer flavour, you can toast the kaniwa under the grill before cooking it.

MEAL IDEAS Kaniwa is very versatile indeed, and its slightly sweet flavour means that it can be used in place of oatmeal for breakfast - just simmer the seeds in milk, add some warming spices like cinnamon and nutmeg then add some honey or maple syrup and some crunchy toasted nuts and seeds for a delicious porridge alternative. If you don't want the hassle of cooking breakfast, Kaniwa can also be used as a breakfast cereal substitute – serve it with fresh fruit and chopped nuts.

It's also a tasty accompaniment to savoury dishes. Kaniwa's mildly nutty and slightly sweet flavour goes well with meats, and seafood, as well as vegetables, soups and casseroles. You can boost the protein content of soups and stews by simply adding kaniwa while they're simmering on the stove. Simply add some in at the start of cooking, and make sure that there is enough broth or water in the saucepan to cook the kaniwa. If you prefer raw vegetables, kaniwa is the perfect salad base too thanks to its slightly crunchy, nutty qualities, which perfectly compliments freshly chopped vegetables.



14,000ft up in the Andes. Home of Kaniwa

Words Andrew Hamilton **Pictures** Shutterstock

Kaniwa offers some distinct advantages over its more popular cousin , quinoa

The word kaniwa sounds a bit like quinoa, and it turns out that the two species are actually closely related (quinoa's full name is Chenopodium quinoa).

RECIPE IDEA

COCONUT KANIWA SALAD

This is an easy-to-prepare, delicious and super-healthy dish that will appeal to even the most hardened veggie-phobe!

INGREDIENTS

- 100g of kaniwa seeds
- 450mls of coconut milk

To prepare the coconut kaniwa, add the kaniwa seeds and coconut milk to a saucepan. Bring to a boil then let it simmer on medium heat for 15-20 minutes. While this is cooking, it's time to prepare the salad veg.

SALAD INGREDIENTS

- 2 parsnips
- 4 carrots
- ½ small red cabbage
- 1 cup lightly toasted walnuts
- 1 handful fresh rosemary leaves

Peel off the outer skin of the parsnips and carrots using a potato peeler then continue peeling to make tagliatelle-like veggie strands and add to a large bowl. Halve the cabbage head and shred one half very thinly using a sharp knife. Add the shredded cabbage to the bowl of shredded parsnips and carrots. Toast the walnuts until golden in a dry frying pan on medium heat and add along with the rosemary leaves and cooked coconut Kaniwa to the bowl.

DRESSING INGREDIENTS

- 1 clove garlic
- 2 tbsp of virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp of honey or maple syrup
- Juice of 1 lime
- ½ tsp of salt
- ¼ tsp of black pepper
- 1 tbsp of water
- 2 tbsp of tamari

Crush the clove of garlic and add to a small cup. Add all other dressing ingredients and whisk together with a fork. Pour dressing over the kaniwa and veggies and toss well. Serve and enjoy!

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Words Rob Kemp **Pictures** Shutterstock

Fix it with food

Whatever your injury or ailment there's a food fix.

COME-BACK FROM CRAMP

Leg cramps often occur because of a mineral, or electrolyte imbalance in the body. "It can be low potassium, sodium, magnesium and chloride levels, often accompanied by dehydration," explains Kate Percy, nutritionist and author of *Go Faster Food* (gofasterfood.com). "Foods high in potassium include bananas, dried apricots, avocados, oranges, sweet potatoes, water melon, white beans, yoghurt, green leafy vegetables and clams." Foods high in calcium and magnesium include greed leafy vegetables like kale or broccoli, almonds, sardines (with bones), nuts and seeds, bananas and dairy products. For athletes it's vital to try and prevent cramp kicking-in - Percy suggests reducing your risk by increasing electrolyte intake during your exercise. "Make your own sports drink by mixing 250ml orange or apple juice with 250ml water plus a pinch of salt," she says. "Watermelon juice and coconut water are also excellent sources of electrolytes."

MEALS TO REPAIR MUSCLE TEARS

Protein is key to boosting your muscles' recovery, and strength and power - whether for long or short distances or heavy or light resistances. You've plenty of sources to choose from, such as lean meats, legumes, nuts and low-fat dairy.

"The vital part is that you aim for around 20-25g of protein every three to four hours, at each meal or snack," says Emma Barraclough, senior sports nutritionist for Science in Sport (scienceinsport.com). "It's the amino acids provided by quality protein that are needed to repair damaged muscles." Whether it's a major pull or simply the side effects of a tough training session you can get that fix of protein through a three-egg omelette or 3-4oz of meat, poultry, or fish.

FEED OFF COLDS & FLU

Not unique to runners, riders or swimmers, but certainly a major obstacle to being able to train or compete at the peak of your abilities. "With viruses it's not possible to say any particular foods will fix things – you just have to let them run their course unfortunately," says Barraclough. But it is possible to boost your immune system and help strengthen your recovery by ensuring you're armed with the right fuels to fight flu.

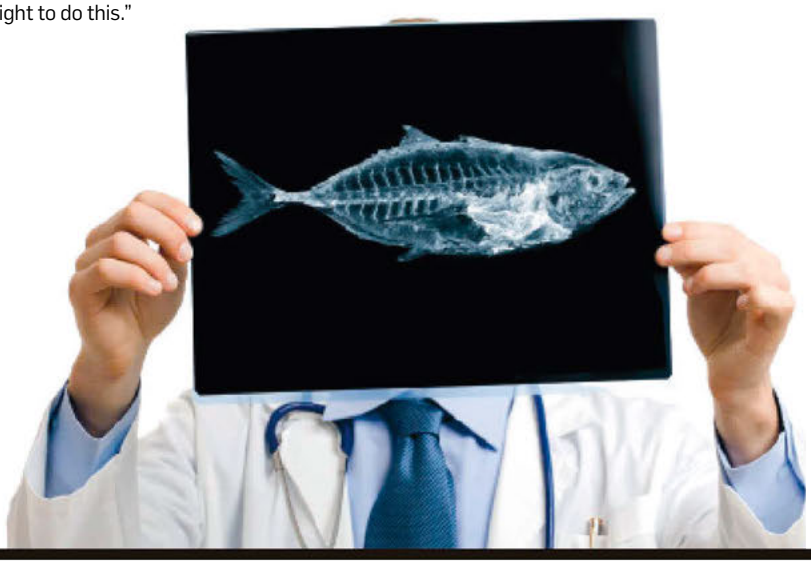
"Whilst many think that it's pro-biotics that help endurance athletes boost their immunity, research shows that it's good quality carbs and not going on a low-carb diet when you're suffering from a virus that will help recovery," says Barraclough. Carb sources that feature flu-fighting nutrients, such as betacarotene and vitamin A, include carrots, sweet potatoes and spinach.

BONE-UP ON FRACTURE FIXERS

Stress fractures can account for up to 20%*of attendances at sports medicine clinics – and taking on board the right nutrients is crucial to a solid recovery. After the inflammation eases a healing bone fracture goes into a reparative phase with cartilage and bone-building cells starting to weave together to form stronger new bones. "Calcium provides the mineral content to toughen up the bone tissue and aid its renewal," says Barraclough. "Milk and dairy provide calcium in a natural form - other contributing nutrients include protein and vitamin D."

The role of protein – especially from fish sources – can be crucial too. Oily fish provides a good source of omega-3 fats, which will also promote healthy bone growth. "You need high quality proteins and amino acids such as lysine, arginine, proline, glycine, cystine, and glutamine," suggests Jamie Lloyd, trainer and health advisor (iamjamielloyd.com). "Lysine especially enhances the calcium absorption into the bone matrix, aiding the regeneration of tissue."

"Athletes may need to supplement with vitamin D in the winter months," adds Barraclough. "The body can produce this vitamin to strengthen bones among other things but needs plenty of natural sunlight to do this."



FIGHT FATIGUE WITH FOOD

"Fatigue can also be caused by a combination of conflicting factors such as attempting to lose weight whilst raising your training programme," suggests Barraclough. "It's crucial that you maintain a steady supply of low-glycaemic index carbohydrates through your meals when you're training – even if you're focusing on weight management too." Wholegrain cereals are such carbs – they'll help you feel full, provide a drip-feed of energy for your exercise and will keep you blood sugar levels in check. "Female endurance athletes are especially prone to iron deficiencies that can contribute to feelings of fatigue and hamper performance too. It's best to get any iron concerns confirmed by a blood test." Natural sources of fatigue-fighting iron include bran, red meats, such as lamb and beef and also sardines.

RECIPES FOR OVERTRAINERS

Symptoms of overtraining include feelings of not being fully rested ahead of your next training session and noticeable dips in performance. An overhaul of your training and recovery programme may be in order – including a review of your re-fuelling. "Aim to eat a mainly unprocessed diet throughout your training," suggests Percy. A balance of around 60% carbs (that's rice, pasta, couscous, wholegrains and plenty of fruit and veg), 15-20% protein, and the rest from healthy fats.

"Consistently failing to recover properly after training (by eating a carb/protein combo within 15-30 minutes after workout) when you're training intensely on a regular basis can lead to gradual glycogen depletion," warns Percy. "If it happens take a few days off and refuel with unrefined, nutrient-rich carbohydrates such as sweet potatoes, quinoa, brown rice and wholegrain cereals plus quality protein such as chicken and fish and healthy fats (avocados, nuts and seeds)."

* ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17414993

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Sound Fit

SENNHEISER PMX 686G, £79.99 **en-uk.sennheiser.com/pmx-686g-sports**

Whether you're running on busy city streets or out on country trails it pays to be aware of your surroundings. However tempting it might be to cut yourself off completely from the world around, for safety's sake it pays to be able to listen out for traffic, bike bells, and shouts from other outdoor fitness fans.

These new headphones from Sennheiser are designed specifically for trail running. Their neckband helps to keep them securely in place, the vertical in-ear design allows you to stay aware of what's going on around, and when you've finished you can even rinse off the sweat in running water. There's also an inline smart remote and microphone on the cable so you can control your music and even interrupt your workout to receive a (breathless) phone call.

For gym bunnies, the Sennheiser OCX 686 cuts out all exterior noise, so you can listen to your choice of motivational music rather than the tunes piped through the gym's audio system.

Words Damian Hall

Compression tights

Help muscles feel less tender

Smart alecks will tell you there's no hard science to support the concept of compression wear aiding sporting performance. However, in medical circles compression has long been linked to improved blood flow (in averting deep-vein thrombosis for example). Worn post exercise, it may also squeeze out lactic acid and negate fluid retention.

Compression won't make you faster, but it will likely accelerate your recovery from a race or hard long Sunday session. Many of us squeeze into recovery compression leggings (leggings sounds less girly than tights) after a tough workout, sleep in them and even wear them to work on a Monday – not forgetting a more socially acceptable pair of trousers over the top. They might also be worn for slow recovery runs or cycles.

1 UNDER ARMOUR RECHARGE ENERGY LEGGINGS £60,

underarmour.co.uk

Under Armour's Recharge Energy Leggings were worn for a day and night after the London Marathon, in an effort to speed muscles back towards non-whingeing normality.

A reassuringly firm waistband holds the tights up effectively where others tend to head south sooner than ideal.

They're a satisfyingly tight fit – they feel like they're working – but allow a surprising amount of flexibility too. The tights feel pleasingly cool, even with jeans worn on top. If wearing nothing underneath though, you'll want to remove a large, erm, inconveniently placed label right away.

Disappointingly a hole appeared near a seam in these tights within just two hours of wear.

Verdict: Comfortable, cool and effective, but with question marks over longevity.

Rating ■■■■■■■□□□

2 COMPRESSPORT F-LIKE FULL LEG SLEEVE £69.99,

compressport.uk.com

First you have to overcome the mental barrier. Yes, initially Compressport's F-Like Full Leg Sleeves makes you feel like you're getting ready to go on the Rocky Horror Show. But fear not, because A), these don't come with a suspender belt, and B), they're the most effective leg compression wear on test.

These were worn after the Great Lakeland 3Day mountain marathon, for the six-hour drive home and in bed that night, and I noticed remarkable improvement in leg soreness – more than could have been hoped for. They can offer better leg compression than full tights as the hips aren't being restrained at all. And you're much less likely to overheat in these, too.

However, some may feel odd about wearing them on a (recovery) run.

Verdict: Feels weird at first, but the most effective recovery compression.

Rating ■■■■■■■■■□

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Quads tend to suffer most, especially from downhill running, and so compression leggings therefore need to feel tight and compact around the thighs to aid efficient recovery. Calves too should feel like they're being squeezed.

At the same time, however, the leggings need to feel comfortable and your overall movement still wide ranging. They should be something you can sleep in, or at least drive down the M5 for five hours in. Consider how warm they are too, as you don't want to start slow cooking at work on Monday.

Inessential extras include key pockets, drawcords (if they don't have one, look for a broad, firm waistband) and reflective tabs. Ideally try before you buy, as the wrong fit will be ineffective.

and speed up their repair after a race, with recovery compression wear.

3 2XU RECOVERY COMPRESSION TIGHTS £100,
2xu.co.uk

A small internal pocket and drawstring waistband are nice touches on 2XU's Recovery Compression Tights, but their biggest boon is all-round comfort. They don't offer the compression level of the Compressport or Odlo, but they feel cat-suit slick and you simply want to wear them.

I slept in them on the first night of the Great Lakeland 3Day mountain marathon – they're the most comfy leggings for sleeping in on test – and felt so good they were run in all the next day. Then slept in again. Then run in again – and there was no pong either.

If we're allowed to be superficial, they look the best, too.

Verdict: Good rather than great compression, but you simply won't want to take them off.
Rating

4 SKINS RY400 £90,
skins.net

The medium-size Skins RY400 are longer and less-tight than the other medium-sized leggings on test, which suggests they need to be tried before they're bought and probably a smaller size than usual purchased.

Like the 2XUs, they feel slick and comfortable, but the size tested didn't offer effective compression.

They have a Y-front set-up, which gives them a Long John-feel and the uneasy sensation that you're wearing underwear in public.

The combination of nylon and spandex is also rather warm, despite ventilation panels, and the tights (or rather the wearer!) got too warm on easy-paced recovery cycles in late-spring.

Verdict: Comfortable, but compression levels uncertain and you may find them too warm for summer.
Rating

5 ODLO MUSCLE FORCE VIS £115,
odlo.com

Odlo's Muscle Force Vis are curious and eye-catching with their silicon spider web. The silicon print is supposed to give extra compression in key areas – quads, hamstrings and calves – but, far more importantly, the curvy, sci-fi patterns makes those muscles of yours look bigger.

The extra compression is certainly felt, and there's good flexibility too. But again these leggings are made slightly larger than some so it might be worth dropping down a size to feel the full benefit.

They also feel cool to the skin. A drawcord and a small zipped pocket are included, as well as reflective tabs.

Verdict:Sci-fi spiderman curios with great compression expected from the right fit.
Rating

Road cycling jerseys

It's that blissful time of year when you can ride with bare arms, so hit the road in style.

1 PEARL IZUMI ELITE, £69.99, madison.co.uk

There's a lovely stretch to the silky fabric on the chest and back of this jersey, which makes it extremely comfortable against the skin. The stretch is only lateral, however, which cleverly stops kit stowed in the rear pockets from sagging down over your backside. More importantly, the close fit and Pearl Izumi's "In-R-Cool" fabric (developed originally for pro-level riders) wicks sweat away from your skin with super efficiency, and offers UPF 50+ protection. Long mesh panels down the side boost ventilation. This jersey is ideal for warm-weather riding, and there's even a sweat-proof zippered pocket, which kept a coffee-stop tenner dry on a long, hot day.

Verdict: **Smooth against the skin, this is a top jersey for scorching days.**

Rating ■■■■■■■■■□

2 FAST FORWARD JERSEY, £53, paligap.cc

Made by Craft, this jersey has out-and-out race credentials. Its super-slender cut is designed for racing snakes – it's both aero-fitting and short, although good hem grippers keep it in place. There's even an internal rear pocket for a race radio (it would double as an MP3 holder if you like to listen to music as you ride). Up close, the fabric is a honeycomb-like structure, with only the thinnest of mesh covering thousands of small holes, which means it's super cool when your temperature soars – just remember to zip it up before you cross the finish line, arms aloft in a victory salute.

Verdict: **An ultra light jersey for racers – try before you buy because the cut is small.**

Rating ■■■■■■■■□□

3 ALTURA PODIUM, £59.99, zyro.co.uk

This jersey excelled on a sweltering (yes, really) 90-mile ride through the Pennines. It has a figure-hugging design, and the mesh stretch panels under the arms and at the base of the spine aid its breathability. The elasticated sleeve cuffs work beautifully, while sticky grippers at the back keep the jersey in place and have survived two washes so far. Five deep, narrow pockets at the back make it easy to organise your gubbins, and there's also a zippered pocket for more valuable items. The central pocket also has an internal buttonhole to feed a headphone cable through the inside of the jersey.

Verdict: Calling itself the Podium might seem presumptuous, but the Altura deserves to be up there.

Rating ■■■■■■■■■□

Words Jonathan Manning

4 DHB BLOK MESO JERSEY, £39.99, wiggle.co.uk

Targeted squarely at the sportive rider, the Blok Meso jersey boasts three deep, secure open pockets and a fourth zippered pocket for phone, cards or keys. It has a longer, more forgiving fit around the torso than some in the test, but is by no means baggy. And while looks are subjective, we like the print and the fact that it colour co-ordinates with dhb bib shorts (there's also a white/orange version of the jersey). The fabric breathes well, with thousands of virtually concealed perforations, but it still offers UPF 30+ sun protection. A full-length zip provides heat-spilling flexibility, and the hem grip keeps the jersey neatly in place.

Verdict: Ideal for sunny rides and summer sportives.

Rating

5 ENDURA FS260 PRO-PRINTED JERSEY, £64.99, endurasport.com

Three different panels in this jersey serve individual purposes, with mesh under the arms for breathability, Lycra in the sleeves for a non-flap fit, and a wicking fabric across the chest and back. It also has "ColdBlack" technology, which reflects infrared and ultraviolet UV rays to reduce the heating effect of direct sunlight. The British summer hasn't given us the chance to appreciate this, but it would be valuable for anyone riding in hotter climes, as would the UPF 30+ protection. Three deep pockets swallow essential riding paraphernalia with ease, while a small zippered pocket holds keys and cards securely. It's a slim fit and the silicone grippers around the hem keep it all in place.

Verdict: A highly technical jersey that performs brilliantly.

Rating

6 POLARIS GRAN FONDO, £44.99, polaris-bikewear.co.uk

If compliments are a measure of success, this jersey will be selling well this summer. The clear blocks of colour have eye-catching appeal, and differentiate between more breathable side panels under the arms, and the fabric used for the front, shoulders and back. It's similar to the dhb in having a more generous fit than the other racier jerseys, and it may prove a little baggy for riders built like stick insects, although a broad gripper tape at the hem keeps it securely anchored. Three deep pockets plus a phone-sized zip pocket and reflective detailing add to its appeal, while a full-length flap keeps the zip away from the skin for comfort.

Verdict: A stylish jersey that's spot on for sportives.

Rating

Road cycling helmets

Stand out and stay safe as you ride with a new helmet.

1 GIRO SYNTHE, £199.99
zyro.co.uk
The Synthe is an "aero" helmet, with a more orthodox look. It's neat and compact and honed in a wind tunnel for minimum drag. It still provides first class cooling, and on both interval training and long, hilly rides it has proved highly breathable and very comfortable. Part of this is due to the whisp-thin internal frame that allows for a very snug, micro-adjustable fit but still keeps the slender padding away from the hard shell of the helmet so that air can circulate inside. Sunglasses' ports at the front gripped my Oakleys securely, and for those who like to colour-coordinate their clobber, it's available in several colours.
Verdict: With its combination of cooling and aero-efficiency, it's no surprise to see the Synthe on the heads of so many pro riders.
Rating

2 ENDURA AIRSHELL, £89.99
endurasport.com
With three vertical positions to choose from and a ratchet-dial for horizontal fine-tuning, it's easy to get a perfect fit with the Airshell. The long vents allow good air flow through the helmet so over-heating is never an issue, and a spare set of pads is a generous touch for when the inside has got sweaty one-too-many times. The vivid green stands out dramatically on the road, and there's reflective detailing on the straps and back of the helmet to improve rider visibility at night. While it's not the lightest on test, it's still around the median mark, which is highly impressive for a helmet of this price. It also comes with a case for keeping it safe between rides.
Verdict:This feels at home with helmets that cost twice the price, which makes it something of a bargain.
Rating

3 DHB ION HI VIZ, £24.99
wiggle.co.uk
The crazy tribalism of road and mountain bike riders is exposed in this budget helmet that serves both sports – just clip in or remove the visor. The essential point is that the helmet will protect your bonce when gravity beats your riding skills. While the iON is easily the heaviest helmet on test, due in part to its chunky internal frame and straps, its generous padding cushions it comfortably, and weight would only become an issue on longer rides. It also has a reassuring depth of protection at the base of the skull. Despite its large size, its 61cm circumference still feels significantly smaller than the other helmets, which is worth considering if your head is on the larger size.
Verdict: An exceptional price makes this excellent value, especially if you want a hi-viz helmet for commuting.
Rating

4 LAZER HELIUM MIPS, £169.99
madison.co.uk
The Helium MIPS is a pro-level helmet with the addition of "MIPS" (Multi-Directional Impact Protection System), designed to protect the head in crashes where the angle of collision creates rotational violence to the brain. Thankfully it's not something we've put to the test, but it was reassuring to have on Belgian cobbles where a fall seemed imminent at any moment. All this protection comes with a bit of a weight penalty, with the Helium more than 60g heavier than the Poc. On the plus side, the 19 vents offer first class cooling, and the ratchet for the internal retention system is handily out of the way high on the helmet. Unfortunately one of its slender cables snapped within two months of use.
Verdict: If you race hard or are prone to a fall, the combination of Helium and MIPS make a compelling case.
Rating

5 BELL STAR PRO WITH SHIELD, £199.99
zyro.co.uk
A hybrid between an aero helmet and a standard road helmet, the Star Pro is ideal for shorter races and time trialling and triathlon, especially if you're self-conscious that a full teardrop helmet leaves you in danger of looking like having all the gear and no idea. A slider on the top closes the vents for wind-cheating sleekness and has also proved useful at keeping out rain. The Zeiss visor clips in straightforwardly and offers excellent wide-screen vision, especially when riding on aero-bars. The Star Pro's limited venting means airflow inside naturally suffers – this isn't a helmet for a century sportive ride – but it's a great option for a weekly club TT or a fast and furious circuit race and triathlon, although it swiftly proved sweaty when I really put the hammer down.
Verdict: An innovative solution for racing and time trialling, with ventilation sacrificed for aero-efficiency.
Rating

6 POC OCTAL AVIP, £220
2pure.co.uk
The funkiest-looking helmet we've seen for years, the Octal combines an outsize shell with a feather-light weight. In fluoro-orange it's led to riding buddy taunts that I look like a Swan Vesta match, but time-after-time this is the helmet I've chosen for rides and it's err.. great for when I strike for the front! The fewer, larger vents offer excellent cooling, the protection at the temples and back of the head is reassuring, and the weight is exceptional. The only downside is the helmet's width, and the fact that the straps are moulded into the liner, meaning they are too wide to have the arms of my sunglasses on the outside (a fashion faux-pas in some cycling circles). There is, however, an "eye garage" to store sunnies when they're not in use.
Verdict: The weight, head coverage, ventilation and eye-popping colour make this a clear winner.
Rating

Words Jonathan Manning

Giant Defy Advanced SL1

Built to defy the unique cobbled and Tarmac terrain of the classic Paris-Roubaix race, Giant's disc-equipped mile-muncher dispatches long rides in comfort.

WHEN GIANT-ALPECIN'S John Degenkolb made his race-winning break from the leading group at this year's Paris-Roubaix, and entered the historic Roubaix velodrome to finish 31 seconds ahead of his nearest rival, he had conquered the 253km course on a bike very similar to the one you see here.

Giant's Defy Advanced is built for comfort over long days in the saddle, as well as speed, and our impression of this bike is that it certainly goes the distance. With a fairly generous wheelbase, handling isn't what you'd call razor-sharp, but it is easy and precise. Plus, finishing kit like Fizik's Aliante saddle and Giant's own compact bars and sumptuous bar tape make for a cosseting ride. Faster downhill corners are rolled with confidence, and undulating roads highlight a surprisingly sprightly turn of speed when out of the saddle to power over crests. We've used Shimano's hydraulic disc brakes on a number of test bikes now, and these are typical of the breed – there's plenty of braking force when you need it, but their real benefit is more precise modulation of that force, especially adding confidence when the roads are damp.

The Defy also features a compact, 50/34 chainset, flying in the face of the current trend for 52/36 for a lot of bike firms. It's all the better for this, especially on the kind of all-day rides you'll find yourself itching to do on this bike. It's not the lightest machine in the world – a fairly middling 8.2kg, in fact – but with a lowest available gear of 30/28 from its silky-smooth 11-speed Shimano Ultegra set-up, most riders will be able to surmount most hills. It's also a solid platform on which to stamp when you feel the need to sprint uphill. Not rocket-ship, mountain-climber fast, but rapid enough to surprise us, given its overall bulk.

Of course, the Defy Advanced's natural habitat is the long training ride or sportive. Four hours in the saddle produced barely any discomfort, with next to no intrusive vibration through the bars or seatpost (which is an integral part of the frame, and cut to height). For what's essentially an endurance bike, the ease with which we got the power down was a pleasant surprise. Giant's frame is a sure, solid winner for long rides as well as WorldTour races, ensuring that no matter how far you want to ride, you'll finish your journey in comfort. Even if you do take in the odd cobbled sector...

GIANT DEFY ADVANCED SL1

Price £3,499
Weight 8.2kg
Fork Advanced SL carbon-fibre
Chainset Shimano Ultegra, 50/34
Gears Ultegra, 11-speed (11-28)
Brakes Shimano hydraulic discs
Wheels Giant P-SLR0 Disc
Tyres Giant P-SLR01 (700 x 25)
More info giant-bicycles.com

Words Marc Abbott **Pictures** Stuart Collins

The Defy Advanced's natural habitat is the long training ride or sportive. Four hours in the saddle produced barely any discomfort.

Long-term tests

From smocks to socks and base layers to outer layers, we give you the low-down on the kit we've been abusing (positively!).

1 Berghaus VapourLight HyperTherm Reversible Smock, £130
More info: berghaus.com
A lightweight insulation jacket with different levels of warmth depending on which way round you wear it? It sounded gimmicky and I was sceptical. But either way, at just 156g, if Berghaus's VapourLight HyperTherm Reversible Smock was reasonably warm it would still be very useful. I wore it during the night on the South Wales Traverse, which although in August, was chilly. And it was superb, easily warm enough but breathable too. Though I was too tired to remember which side was warmer or cooler – there is a discernible difference. I used it again at the Welsh 1000m Peaks Race this May in 50-mile winds. I could have just about got by with a windshirt but it was reassuring to know I had that extra bit of warmth with me. Providing such good warmth for such little weight, I now chuck it into my pack without even thinking about it. A hooded version (221g, £150) is available too.
Damian Hall, contributor

2 Islabikes Luath 26, £449.99
More info: islabikes.co.uk
There was a certain frisson of pride, I'll admit, when my children each first asked for their own road bike. True, it signalled the beginning of the end of my cherished solo "me time" weekend rides, but equally it laid the foundations of what will hopefully be a lifetime of quality riding together (and it won't be too many years before I'm drafting in the wake of their boundless energy). To ensure this future gets off to a sound start, I bought a second-hand Islabikes Luath 26, which is designed specifically for the younger (9-11 years old) rider. Thankfully there's a vibrant trade in used models on eBay and while they're still pricey, they don't suffer much depreciation when you trade them on. The best thing about the Luath, however, is its child-friendly dimensions; from the geometry of the frame, to the width of the handlebars, to the short-reach brake levers. Add in the fact that a simple tyre swap changes this robust, aluminium frame from road racer to cyclocross bike, and it really is a cracking piece of kit.
Jonathan Manning, contributing editor

3 Pearl Izumi Barrier SS Cycling Base, £44.99
More info: **madison.co.uk**
Occasionally a product comes along that makes me wonder why no one has thought of this before. Truth be told, a Google search revealed that, err, a couple of companies have already thought of it, but that hasn't diluted my affection for this wind-stopping short-sleeve baselayer. Family responsibilities mean I'm often squeezing rides into the chilly pre-breakfast hours, which is when this Barrier wind blocking baselayer comes into its own. It's very close fitting, keeps my torso warm when the mercury is low, yet breathes brilliantly across the back so I don't get cold from condensing sweat. Paired with arm warmers it has transformed my dawn rides.
Jonathan Manning, contributing editor

4 Jottnar HYMIR waterproof jacket, £230
More info: jottnar.com
I'm too much of a scaredy-cat to push my climbing beyond simple scrambles, but when it comes to choosing outdoor kit it always seems to pay dividends to see what the mountaineers are wearing. Their demands for stretch, breathability, practical features and low weight make climbing kit about the best you can buy. This may mean that I'm out in the hills in kit that's over-engineered for my needs, but it's a price I'll happily pay as this Hymir jacket underlines. It's made from three-layer Polartec Neoshell, which means it's exceptionally breathable for a waterproof jacket, yet it packs up into a very small, space-saving pouch when not required. The streamlined cut means it doesn't catch on rock faces, and the hem is long enough to avoid a bare back when I need to stretch upwards. The wired peak of the hood works well, and the smock design is particularly effective with a large rucksack waistbelt. It's the only jacket I'll need until the late autumn.
Jonathan Manning, contributing editor

5 X-Socks Run Fast, £11.99
More info: x-socks.co.uk
If I paid a quarter as much attention to my socks as I do to my running shoes, I'd have significantly happier feet. Normally it's a hurried grab for whatever clean pair is sitting at the top of my sock drawer, but these Run Fast socks serve as a powerful reminder to make a more discerning choice. Shaped individually for left and right foot, they grip in the right places to avoid wrinkles, rucks and blisters, and there's extra cushioning at the heel and toes. There's even a channel on the inner side, from ankle to foot, to help keep your feet cool. Verdict? A small investment to get the best from your running.
Jonathan Manning, contributing editor

6 Terra Nova Moonlite Bag Cover, £100
More info: terra-nova.co.uk
Some long-distance races include a bivvy bag in the mandatory kit list, and it's tempting to think you'll never need one and look for the lightest possible option. But the lightest bivvy bags seem little more than survival bags or glorified bin liners. They have minimal to no breathability and with a down sleeping bag, which I prefer, that's a bad combination – leading to condensation and dwindling warmth. Breathable material weighs that little bit more.

But at an impressive 180g, the Terra Nova Moonlite Bag Cover is the lightest bivvy I've found that's both waterproof and breathable. In truth I haven't used it in anger. But in preparation for the Spine Race along the Pennine Way, I tested it for a drizzly night in my back garden, which got the neighbour's curtains twitching, and I couldn't fault it. It packs down to little more than a brolly and it's becoming a popular choice.
Damian Hall, contributor

1
2
4
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JOTTNAR

Reader challenge

"The off-road races appeal to me a lot more than on-road because of the lifestyle or nature elements of it."

NOTHING BEATS RACING off-road, says Jim McConnel, winner of this year's Triathlon England, Cross Duathlon Championships, which involved a 10km trail run, 21km mountain bike, followed by a final 5km trail run.

McConnel is 41, lives in Letchworth and is a brand manager in the cycling industry. This is what he told Outdoor Fitness about getting started in Cross Duathlon and what it's all about.

"My second real bike was a Muddyfox mountain bike and I started riding the Quantock Hills with a mate. It enabled us to do something that we had done on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, which was to get away from roads and people, and the Quantocks are beautiful. From there I went into mountain bike racing and found I was competitive. I'd pile into a van on a Saturday with a bunch of mates as part of a small shop team and head off to race, and it was great.

Then later when off-road duathlons started I was fortunate to find I could run off the bike. I'm neither a brilliant runner nor a brilliant mountain biker, but when you put the two disciplines together, crucially I found I could go straight from one to the other. My 10km time is not that different from my best off-the-bike 10km time.

The off-road races appeal to me a lot more than on-road because of the lifestyle or nature elements of it. I once did a road triathlon on the south coast and I nearly nodded off in the middle of the bike because it just went up and down the seafront. There's also a certain tenseness about road events, everyone seems very particular about everything, and there's a sense of nervousness about getting in your shoes at the right time and getting your helmet on in the right place.

For me, it's not all about winning. I haven't won very much, and I was very fortunate to win the national Cross Duathlon Championships this year. That was a mixture of good training, a good run base and a little bit of luck on the day with the conditions. But I have enjoyed every race I have been in and striving to get to the top or near it.

Off-road courses are fun and all-comer friendly. You need to be very fit cardiovascular-wise because there are ups and downs, but technically you do not need to have a degree in mountain biking! Bike times in duathlon tend to be quite fast. You run the bike tyres a little bit harder, and you have to think about grip and your position on the bike. Off-road running is also kinder on your legs. Concrete is hard! Off-road also feels healthier – I see Tarmac taking over the world and people rushing about, but if I see a trail winding away I feel I will be freer, cleaner and have a better life.

Next up in cross duathlon are the ETU Championships in Northern Spain (near Bilbao) in October where I'll get to race in the 40-44 age category against all the other old multisport goats of Europe."

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Daniel Halksworth *- "Tri-sports Lanzarote is the perfect destination if you want to go away and train hard, eat amazing food and relax as if you were in your own home. Its literally the perfect combination of everything"*

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YEAR 8

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